

The SAGE Handbook of  
Gender and Psychology



Edited by  
Michelle K. Ryan and  
Nyla R. Branscombe



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# About the Editors

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**Diana E. Betz** is a PhD candidate in the social psychology program at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She studies the impact of stereotypes on motivation and prejudice. Her dissertation examines women and girls' reactions to counterstereotypic science role models, including feminine science role models. She also studies the effects of stereotype-driven humor, including jokes that use stereotypes to satirically undermine prejudice, as well as intergroup beliefs about the everyday relevance of race.

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**Kay Bussey** is an Associate Professor in Psychology at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. She has been the recipient of a Fulbright Award and on three occasions has been a Visiting Scholar at Stanford University, California. She is on the editorial board of the *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* and serves as an editorial consultant for numerous psychology journals and scientific organizations. Her interests and publications span several areas of social development, including gender development, moral development, children's participation in the legal system, and school bullying.

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**Ngairé Donaghue** is an Associate Professor in Social Psychology at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia. Her research centers around ideological aspects of gender and subjectivity, with a particular focus on critical feminist understandings of embodiment and the sexualization of culture.

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**Agneta Fischer** is Professor of Emotion Theory and Research at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Her major area of research is the study of emotion, especially social context influences on the experience and expression of emotion, including gender differences in emotion. She has studied gender differences in anger and anger regulation, but also social implications of emotion expressions by men and women, such as crying. Other areas of her research include emotional mimicry and contagion, and more broadly social context effects on facial expression.

**Erin Fletcher** is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Economics at Gettysburg College, Pennsylvania. Her research examines issues of gender, families, and maternal decision-making as well as gender-based violence.

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**Silvia Galdi** received her PhD at the University of Padua, Italy, in 2009. She is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Padua on a research program titled 'An alternative route to performance deficit under stereotype threat: Implicit stereotypes without stereotype awareness'. Her current research interests include: mutual relationships between implicit and explicit attitudes in decision making; implicit components of self-stereotyping and ingroup-stereotyping; sexual harassment; and implicit determinants of stereotype threat in children. She received the Best PhD dissertation Prize from the Italian Association of Psychology in 2009.

**David C. Geary** is a Curators' Professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences and the Interdisciplinary Neuroscience Program at the University of Missouri. He has published more than 225 articles, commentaries, and chapters across a wide range of topics, including three sole-authored books: *Children's Mathematical Development* (APA, 1994), *Male, Female: The Evolution of Human Sex Differences* (now in second edition, APA, 2010), and *The Origin of Mind: Evolution of Brain, Cognition, and General Intelligence* (APA, 2004) as well as one co-authored book, *Sex Differences: Summarizing More Than a Century of Scientific Research* (Psychology Press, 2008).

**Jamie Goldenberg** is Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of South Florida. Her research focuses on the impact of existential concerns associated with mortality on attitudes toward sex and the body, and women's bodies in particular. She has published extensively on the topic, and currently has a grant from the National Cancer Institute of NIH to apply her theoretical model to cancer-relevant health behavior.

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**Peter Hegarty** is a Reader and the Head of the School of Psychology at the University of Surrey, UK. Details of his 70+ publications on gender, sexuality, social psychology and the history of psychology are available on his website at [www.surrey.ac.uk/psychology/people/dr\\_peter\\_hegarty/](http://www.surrey.ac.uk/psychology/people/dr_peter_hegarty/). His first book is a new study of the interpenetration of the IQ testing movement and sexology in the first half of the 20th century in the United States: *Gentlemen's Disagreement: Alfred Kinsey, Lewis Terman, and the Sexual Politics of Smart Men* (University of Chicago Press, April 2013).

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**Tim Kurz** is a Senior Lecturer in social psychology at the University of Exeter, UK. His research focuses on the ways in which various feminist dilemmas are negotiated within social interaction in the context of 'post-feminism'. Such dilemmas have included the sexualization of culture, cosmetic surgery, and parenting practices such as infant feeding. A particular focus of his work has been the problematization of accounts that explain societal-level phenomena by recourse to individualistic notions of 'personal choice'. Other research interests include social psychological aspects of environmental sustainability and the ability of public policy to influence social constructions of moral obligation.

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**Kasey Lynn Morris** is a graduate student in social psychology at the University of South Florida. Her research focuses on existential motivations for the objectification of women, and self-objectification in response to mortality concerns associated with the female body.

**Thomas A. Morton** is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Exeter, UK. His research focuses on the ways in which people experience and express their identities in relation to others, and the role of strategic considerations and reality constraints in guiding these processes. His work on this theme has covered such topics as intergroup relations, conflict, and forgiveness; intragroup processes, deviance, and change; stigma, prejudice and stereotyping, and minority and devalued identities. He is currently an Associate Editor for the *British Journal of Social Psychology*.

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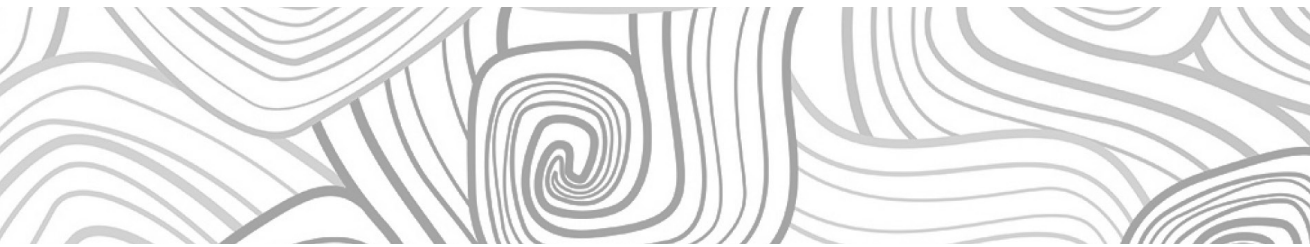
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PART I

# How Gender is Studied







# Understanding Gender: Methods, Content, and Controversies

Michelle K. Ryan and Nyla R. Branscombe

Almost 40 years have passed since the publication of Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) seminal work *The Psychology of Sex Differences*. The book played a crucial role in bringing together the, until then, amorphous literature on gender differences within psychology, and in shaping research in the field in subsequent years. Maccoby and Jacklin's book is deservedly a classic within psychology, and as such it is a useful reference point from which we can examine the current state of the psychological literature in relation to gender.

In this first chapter we have the twin aims of introducing readers to the exciting contributions to be found in this *Sage Handbook of Gender and Psychology*, and also to take stock of the current state of the field by examining what has changed over the past 40 years and what has remained the same. In doing so we will identify new approaches and techniques used to examine the role of gender in social behavior, ascertain new questions that have captured researchers' imaginations, and explore some of the current controversies that have emerged within the field.

## HOW WE STUDY GENDER: CONSTANCY AND CHANGE

Over the past 40 years, much has changed in the way in which we do psychology. We now study a broader sample of participants than ever before, new technologies have opened up a range of research questions and the means to address them, and new statistical techniques allow us to investigate more complex research questions. Much of this volume evaluates and integrates the knowledge that we gained, and details the increasingly sophisticated perspectives on gendered phenomena that have emerged.

Although *The Psychology of Sex Differences* was not a developmental volume *per se*, it did focus particularly on gender differences in children and adolescents. While this may have been, in part, due to the research interests of the authors, it is also likely that it reflected the consistent underrepresentation of adult women as the subject of psychological research at the time (Gannon, Luchetta, Rhodes, Pardie, & Segrist, 1992). Many psychological studies included few women or had exclusively male participants, but such underrepresentation of

female participants was less prevalent in developmental journals of the time (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006). Thus gender comparisons may have been easier to make with children and adolescents than with adults.

It is no longer the case, however, that research on gender concentrates on children. Nor are adult samples any longer limited to men. Indeed, often of late, due to the availability of undergraduate student samples, there is a focus on women, and it is male participants who are more likely to be under-represented. Thus, as a whole, the chapters in this volume describe research that draws on a much broader sample of individuals than has been true in the past. Indeed, the psychology of gender is often either the psychology of women or the psychology of gender differences. While this may be a reaction to the traditional use of exclusively male samples, it has meant that it is only recently that psychologists have explicitly addressed issues concerning men and masculinity, a focus exemplified by **Bosson** and her colleagues in Chapter 8 with their discussion of precarious manhood, and by **Baumeister** in Chapter 17 in his discussion of men's distinct contribution to culture.

This widening (or deepening) of the psychological participant pool has also allowed for an expansion of our understanding of what is meant by the term 'developmental'. Developmental gender research is no longer restricted to the study of infants or children, although this period is obviously still important and is reviewed by **Bussey** in Chapter 6. More recently, and within this volume, developmental issues have been examined across the lifespan – and can include the gendered outcomes of (a) becoming a parent, as discussed in the context of the workplace by **Fuegen and Biernat** in Chapter 9; (b) of moving countries, as outlined in **Deaux and Greenwood's** discussion of the gendered outcomes of immigration (Chapter 15); and (c) increasingly important in our aging society, within older age, as discussed by **Kemper** in Chapter 10.

While this more inclusive sampling across the lifespan has certainly broadened the gender research agenda over the past 40 years, this is not to say that there is no room for continued improvement. As outlined by **Hegarty** and his colleagues in Chapter 3, research on gender is by no means immune to the androcentrism we see in other areas of psychology, where men or masculinity are seen as central, normative, and "normal". Moreover, our understanding of gender and its implications for behavior is still primarily based on an American or Western European perspective, as argued by both **Grabe** in Chapter 25 and **Kurtiş and Adams** in Chapter 16.

During the past 40 years we have also seen increasing complexity in the research methods available to us, both in the way in which data are collected and in the ways we analyze the information (see **Eagly**, Chapter 2). These include the examination of gender differences using new psychometric tests (see **Guimond et al.**, Chapter 14; **Barreto and Ellemers**, Chapter 18) or expanding technologies to assess psychophysiological responses (see **Fischer and Evers**, Chapter 12; **Matheson and Foster**, Chapter 20) including fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging). However, as argued by **Fine**, in Chapter 4, such innovations are not without their limitations.

Similarly, new analytic techniques have come to the fore, or become more accessible to psychologists. These include more complex approaches to testing for moderation and mediation, multi-level analysis, and structural equation modeling. Such analyses allow us to ask more complex questions and come up with more nuanced explanations for gendered phenomenon. For example, with an increasing number of psychological studies examining gender and gender differences (either explicitly or by default), new analytic means of synthesizing whole bodies of research, such as the development of meta-analysis, outlined by **Eagly** in Chapter 2, allow us to obtain a more integrated picture of what the literature does,

or does not, tell us about gender and gender differences.

## CHANGES IN THE QUESTIONS THAT WE ASK

Much social change has occurred over the past 40 years. As outlined above, there have been changes in the way in which we study the psychology of gender, but these changes have not occurred in a vacuum. During this time period, we have also experienced many societal shifts, especially in areas that are of relevance to gender researchers. These include the changing roles of women and men – especially the substantial increase of women in the full-time labor force, social movements such as third-wave feminism, and political and economic globalization. Together, these academic and social shifts have had a profound impact on our interests as researchers and have opened up a whole new array of research questions that we are able (and motivated) to ask.

Our research questions are clearly shaped by both the samples to which we have access and by the societal concerns that are salient at the time. For example, Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) focus on children and adolescents as their population of interest meant that examinations of cognitive ability focused on infant perception or school-related learning and memory tasks, as well as academic achievement and motivation. For the same reason, their examination of social behavior tended to focus on parent–child attachment, modeling, and play-activity. Similarly, while women tended to be underrepresented in psychological in the mid-20th century, those studies that did include women tended to concentrate on 'women's issues', such as mothering or sexuality, often from a psychoanalytic theory perspective (Unger, 2001). However, it is not only the topic of study that is shaped by time and place, but also the interpretation of the findings obtained from the studies conducted. For example, Maccoby

and Jacklin's interpretation of gender differences was very much representative of the trend in the 1970s, spurred on by second-wave feminism, to minimize gender difference.

In contrast, gender researchers today cover a much broader array of research areas, as demonstrated by the diversity of topics covered in this Handbook. While 'women's issues', such as sexual violence, are still of great interest to psychologists, they are often approached in very different ways, including the discursive approach outlined by **Kurz and Donaghue** (Chapter 5), the motivational approach taken by **Maass** and colleagues (Chapter 21), or methods of reducing gender-based violence described by **Ball Cooper** and colleagues (Chapter 22).

The research topics that we are drawn to are still, however, influenced by the context in which we, as investigators, are embedded. For example, as outlined by **Barreto and Ellemers** (Chapter 18), reductions in the acceptability of expressing overt sexism, together with the development of more subtle assessment techniques has led to a burgeoning area of research on subtle and benevolent sexism, while **Jetten** and colleagues (Chapter 19) describe the processes by which sexism and gender discrimination can be de-legitimized or legitimized depending on the norms operating in a given time and place. Similarly, an increasingly globalized world has led us to take a greater interest in the psychology of gender as it plays out in different cultural contexts (see **Guimond** and colleagues, Chapter 14), the psychological effects of context change via immigration (see **Deaux and Greenwood**, Chapter 15), and the role of physical attractiveness in marital relationships in different cultural settings (**Kurtiş and Adams**, Chapter 16).

Perhaps one of the greatest societal shifts that we have seen in relation to gender over the past 40 years is the changing role of women in relation to the family and the workplace. In many societies women have been entering higher education and the paid

labor force in increasing numbers. In Western countries specifically, women are now equally represented in higher education and in the workplace more generally (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2012). This shift in Western women's participation in higher education and the workplace has prompted researchers to examine women's performance once they get there. In particular, as **Betz** and colleagues discuss in Chapter 26, a large body of research examines the barriers to women's performance in the form of stereotype threat, particularly in male-dominated areas. Western women's greater participation in public life has also raised interest in understanding differences (and similarities) in the way in which women and men communicate (see **Carli**, Chapter 13) and in the way that they negotiate on behalf of themselves and others (see **Bowles**, Chapter 28). These authors dispel numerous myths concerning women's deficits in these domains, and illustrate how subtle contextual factors can both produce and eliminate gender differences in performance.

Nevertheless, despite Western women having entered the workforce in greater numbers, there is a clear realization that many women are failing to reach the top. For example, while women make up 46.6% of the US workforce, they make up only 16% of company board members and less than 4% of CEOs (Catalyst, 2012). Similar statistics can be found in the United Kingdom (with only 15% female board members) and Australia (with only 8% female board members; Catalyst, 2012). Such statistics have given rise to a body of research, and a myriad of metaphors describing and explaining women's underrepresentation (see **Bruckmuller** and colleagues, Chapter 27) and have prompted policy-makers and legislators to devise techniques to address inequality, such as affirmative action (see **Crosby** and colleagues, Chapter 29), and to reduce gender harassment (see **Maass** and colleagues, Chapter 21).

Over the past 40 years, psychology as a discipline has also experienced shifts and expansions in the research topics that are seen as relevant or popular. The growth in

popularity of health psychology reflects renewed interest in the link between physical and psychological health, and the question of whether the relationship between physical health and well-being differs for women and men has been brought to the fore. This revitalized interest in the mind-body link has resulted in investigations concerning the role that gender plays in the onset of disease and maintenance of health, as exemplified by the discussion of mortality and women's health risks by **Goldenberg** and colleagues (Chapter 24). Likewise, **Grabe's** discussion of body objectification and the potential parallels between different forms of body modification found in the Western world (e.g., breast augmentation) and that found in Africa especially (e.g., genital mutilation) (Chapter 25) serves to remind us that gender and health need to be understood as embedded within existing cultural norms and practices.

In addition to new areas of study, this volume also showcases a range of theoretical frameworks from which gendered differences and similarities can be understood. For example, the development of the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) provided a theoretical approach from which to examine gender in terms of identity processes and their implications for intergroup relations. For example, identity can be used to understand such diverse psychological issues as (a) the legitimization of discrimination (**Jetten** and colleagues, Chapter 19), (b) how individuals might cope with inequality and gender discrimination (**Matheson and Foster**, Chapter 20; and **Morton**, Chapter 23), (c) how social change comes about (**Batalha and Reynolds**, Chapter 11), and (d) the motivations underlying sexual harassment (**Maass** and colleagues, Chapter 21). Similarly, the development of terror management theory (e.g., Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) paved the way for a model of health that helps to explain when women seek or avoid medical tests, including breast examinations (**Goldenberg** and colleagues, Chapter 24).

Social role theory too provides a general framework whereby role changes that occur as people age can be understood (**Kemper**, Chapter 10), when and why communication differences emerge (**Carli**, Chapter 13), whether emotional expressions vary as a function of social structural position (**Fischer and Evers**, Chapter 12), and how role shifts as a result of immigration (**Deaux and Greenwood**, Chapter 15) can affect identity and behavior.

## NEW EXPLANATIONS AND NEW CONTROVERSIES

In their 1974 book, Maccoby and Jacklin argued that ‘before we can understand the “why” and “how” of psychological sex differentiation, we must have as accurate and detailed knowledge as possible concerning the nature of existing difference’ (p. 1). For this reason, they concentrated on documenting evidence for gender differences (and similarities) and exploring the magnitude of those differences. Such an approach can be considered a ‘main effects’ approach – that is, the goal is to demonstrate whether there is or is not a gender difference in ‘behavior X’. However, more recently our research questions have become more complex, both because of the progression of the literature and because of the sophistication of our statistical analyses. Thus, we now not only want to understand ‘what gender differences exist’, but we also want to understand the ‘why and how’ outlined by Maccoby and Jacklin. If we are to think of the description of gender differences as main effects, one useful way of conceptualizing the why and the how is through the distinction between mediation and moderation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In this way, understanding ‘why’ gender differences occur can be addressed best through a mediational approach, where we try to identify the variables or the processes that underlie or account for such differences. For example, we can look to biological factors (**Byrd-Craven and Geary**, Chapter 7) or social stereotypes (**Betz** and colleagues,

Chapter 26) as means of accounting for why women and men might differ from each other. Seeking an understanding of ‘when’ gender differences will be present and when they will not be can be seen as a moderation approach, whereby we examine the way in which gender interacts with other variables. In this way, gender differences may occur in particular contexts but not in others, such as in certain cultures (**Grabe**, Chapter 25; **Guimond** and colleagues, Chapter 14; **Kurtiş and Adams**, Chapter 16), historical periods (**Jetten** and colleagues, Chapter 19), when gender is salient (see **Batalha and Reynolds**, Chapter 11) or in the presence of certain audiences (see **Betz** and colleagues, Chapter 26; **Carli**, Chapter 13; **Fischer and Evers**, Chapter 12).

Within Maccoby and Jacklin’s volume, there was certainly some exploration of the origins of psychological sex differences – the ‘why’ question. While the title of their book seems to focus on ‘sex differences’ this is not to say that they looked exclusively at biological differences. Indeed, given the focus of their work was on children, the explanations considered were predominantly developmental in nature – sex typing, role models, and socialization. Given the politics of the day, it is not surprising that these were much more nurture than nature (see **Morton**, Chapter 23, for a discussion on the politics of essentializing gender).

Maccoby and Jacklin’s explanations for the origins of gender differences can be seen as a relatively proximal approach to the ‘why’ question in that they addressed how gender is learned. On the other hand, their approach could also be considered relatively distal in that the factors they identified were those occurring relatively early in life. This is in contrast to many of the social contextual analyses described in this volume where the critical proximal factors responsible for gender differences (and similarities) can vary throughout adulthood and beyond. Such origin questions are indeed still of great interest, and of growing popularity, especially in the



area of sexual and other forms of close interpersonal behavior, where explanations based on an evolutionary perspective, as outlined by **Byrd-Craven and Geary** (Chapter 7) are emphasized. Other biological approaches to gender, as outlined by **Kemper** (Chapter 10) and **Baumeister** (Chapter 17) have also flourished.

Rather more proximal explanations of gendered behavior (see Deaux & Major, 1987), emphasize the psychological processes that activate gendered attitudes and behaviors, *in situ*. Indeed, many chapters in this volume take this more proximal approach and address social and contextual factors that determine when and how gender differences are expressed. For example, in her examination of gendered differences (and similarities) in communication, **Carli** (Chapter 13) pays particular attention to why and when such differences may occur, rather than simply the difference itself, as does **Bowles** in her discussion of negotiation (Chapter 28). Similarly, looking at gender differences in personality, both **Batalha and Reynolds** (Chapter 11) and **Guimond** and colleagues (Chapter 14) look to explain the circumstances under which differences occur, rather than simply the differences themselves.

Importantly, many of the examinations of gender difference within this volume tend to acknowledge the operation of both proximal and more distal factors. Yet this sets researchers in this field a particularly complicated task; they must not, as Fausto-Sterling (2012) advises biologists, ‘get stuck trying to divide nature from nurture. Remember that living bodies are dynamic systems that develop and change in response to their social and historical contexts. This is as true for rodents as it is for humans. Just because rats do gender one way, doesn’t mean that prairie voles or Japanese macaques or humans do it the same way’ (p. xiii). Nonetheless, several approaches, such as those based on social role theory (**Eagly**, Chapter 2, **Carli**, Chapter 13), social comparison (**Guimond** and colleagues, Chapter 14), and the social identity approach (**Batalha and Reynolds**, Chapter 11; **Jetten** and

colleagues, Chapter 19; **Morton**, Chapter 23) all integrate both distal and proximal approaches. For example, in his chapter, **Baumeister** (Chapter 17) focuses on the interplay of both biological and motivational explanations in his exploration of gender differences in sexuality.

In addition to questions of why, we can also ask questions about ‘when’. In this way many of the chapters in this volume examine the way in which moderating variables influence gendered behaviors and attitudes. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) lamented the lack of research into when gender matters or leads to behavioral differences and when it does not. Specifically, they note that ‘it is regrettable that so few research studies have been deliberately directed towards the discovery of [moderating factors] .... the time has come for research focusing directly upon manipulation of the conditions that ought to elicit differential behavior between the sexes’ (pp. 5–6).

This focus on the why and the when is exemplified by the work on stereotype threat. Not satisfied to examine whether men really were better than women at mathematics, research addressing stereotype threat has provided both a clear mechanism to explain the ‘why’ and exploration of the moderators of the phenomenon has helped us understand the ‘when’ (**Betz** and colleagues, Chapter 26). Similarly, research on social comparison (see **Guimond** and colleagues, Chapter 14) helps us understand not only why gender differences exist, but also when they will be magnified and when they will be attenuated.

As we have noted in the previous section, using an identity framework to understand gender has become increasingly widespread in recent years. Such a theoretical approach tends to consider gender as a social, context-dependent aspect of the self. From this perspective, it does not make sense simply to describe the general magnitude of gender differences in any particular domain overall, but rather such an approach is more likely to investigate the circumstances under which gender has an effect and when it does not.

Consistent with this approach, the research outlined in this Handbook indeed recognizes that gender is not simply a demographic or biological property of the individual. Gendered behavior occurs within complex social contexts, and such gender differences and similarities in behaviors and attitudes are moderated by social circumstances. For example, gendered communication (**Carli**, Chapter 13), emotion (**Fischer and Evers**, Chapter 12), and negotiation (**Bowles**, Chapter 28), to name just a few, most often occur in interaction with other people, and as such are subject to moderation by audience.

Moreover, gender does not exist in isolation; it intersects with other identities or demographic variables, including culture (**Grabe**, Chapter 25; **Guimond** and colleagues, Chapter 14; **Kurtiş and Adams**, Chapter 16), age (**Bussey**, Chapter 6; **Kemper**, Chapter 10), nationality and immigrant status (**Deaux and Greenwood**, Chapter 15) and parental status (**Fuegen and Biernat**, Chapter 9). In this way, interactions with other group membership variables (intersectionality) suggest that gender modifies behavior in some contexts, but not others, and differentially so, depending on ethnic and national origin.

This burgeoning of new approaches and new explanations has also thrown up new controversies and debates in the field (see **Eagly**, Chapter 2, for an update on these debates over the past 20 years). Some of these are related to the ‘teething problems’ of new technologies, or in the utility of applying new technologies to the study of gender. For example, **Fine** (Chapter 4) describes the phenomenon of neurosexism that has arisen from the application of new neuroscience technologies to the study of gender. Similar debates arise from the application of theories from other disciplines to the psychology of gender – such as the development of evolutionary psychology (**Byrd-Craven and Geary**, Chapter 7) or psychobiology (see **Baumeister**, Chapter 17 or **Kemper**, Chapter 10).

Finally, there has also been discussion concerning the need for more nuanced and more subtle investigations and methods in the way

we look at gender. For example, our understanding of the psychology of gender needs to be informed by how we speak about gender, both in our everyday discourse (**Kurz and Donoghue**, Chapter 5) and in the metaphors we use (**Bruckmüller** and colleagues, Chapter 27). Similarly, **Barreto and Ellemers** (Chapter 18) argue that the processes reflecting gendered treatment are becoming increasingly subtle.

## POLITICS AND OBJECTIVITY

One clear debate that has continued over the past 40 years is the politics inherent in the study of gender and gender difference, and the problems that this might entail for scientific objectivity (see **Eagly**, Chapter 2). Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) directly acknowledged the political nature of their work:

We are both feminists ... and although we have tried to be objective about the value-laden topics discussed in this book, we know that we cannot have succeeded entirely. We doubt ... that complete objectivity is possible for anyone engaged in such an enterprise, whether male or female. If our own interpretation bears the marks of feminist bias, this will be detected soon enough by hawk-eyed readers with points of view different from our own. We expect to be challenged. We can promise ... that we have attempted to set forth the reasoning behind our positions as clearly as possible, so that future argument will not be diverted into irrelevancies. (p. 13)

We too are unashamedly feminist. And we certainly make no apologies about this. Does this necessarily mean we are or are not objective? Certainly in terms of our agreement that the scientific method should be applied to the questions we raise, we believe we are objective. But, perhaps not in the sense that the research questions that interest us are clearly driven by the politicized social issues of our time, with an eye toward understanding the conditions that will enable social change aimed at bringing about greater equality. We are not simply interested in describing sexism and its effects; we are interested in reducing sexism. We are certain we would prefer to



live in a more gender-equal world than the one in which we are embedded at the present time. Indeed, a number of the chapters in this volume explicitly outline the way in which psychological research on gender has played an instrumental role in bringing about real change in social policy and practice (see, for example, **Ball Cooper** et al., Chapter 22; **Bowles**, Chapter 28; **Crosby** et al., Chapter 29; **Maass** et al., Chapter 21). For us, it is the political nature of these questions and the consequences of the answers generated that makes this volume so important, and it is what makes the study of gender and its implications for behavior so fascinating. All of the chapters included in this volume speak to real social issues that affect the lives of men and women everyday. When our authors speak of the implications of the research, it is not simply a couple of cursory paragraphs before the conclusions; they raise real implications that may affect all of us.

## CONCLUSIONS AND INTRODUCTION TO THE HANDBOOK

As we hope that you can see from this introductory chapter, there are many different ways in which one can approach the psychology of gender. We have examined the field in terms of the methodologies that are used, the theoretical frameworks from which research questions are approached, the social issues that motivate the research, and the debates that evolve from research concerning gender. It is clear that the many different ways of seeing the psychology of gender are constantly in flux. Much has changed in the 40 years since Maccoby and Jacklin's seminal book, but much will continue to change. Indeed, even within this volume, readers will be able to see the debates unfolding – both within chapters, and between them.

We have divided the volume into five distinct parts – (1) How Gender Is Studied; (2) Development; (3) Gender Differences and Similarities in Context; (4) Conflict and Coping; and (5) Gender and Social

Issues – but we recognize that these are relatively arbitrary groupings. Accordingly, we encourage you as the reader to develop your own narrative around gender, making your own connections between the chapters and following your own interests. To help facilitate these connections, within each of the chapters we have included cross-references to other relevant chapters. So we encourage you, the reader, to jump around, to dip in and out of the various sections, or to follow the story of gender and psychology as we have organized it. But most of all, we encourage you to see the politics as well as the science, and above all else, to engage in these lively debates with the stellar authors of the chapters in this Handbook.

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# The Science and Politics of Comparing Women and Men: A Reconsideration

Alice H. Eagly

## INTRODUCTION

Controversies about the meaning and implications of psychological research that compares women and men have persisted over many decades. It is right and proper that this research area receives this scrutiny, given its scientific importance and political relevance. In this chapter I discuss this continuing interest, particularly in relation to the issues that I raised in an article titled ‘The science and politics of comparing women and men’, which appeared in 1995 in *American Psychologist* (Eagly, 1995). In that article I questioned earlier claims that the sex-related differences demonstrated by psychological research are uniformly small, unusually unstable across studies, commonly artifactual, and contrary to the content of gender stereotypes. I further argued that research findings had undermined the feminist political agenda of raising women’s status by deploying empirical research to disconfirm gender stereotypes. Instead, increasing women’s access to a wider range of social roles is the far more

effective route to raising women’s status. To revisit these issues, I divide my comments according to science and politics – that is, some issues are primarily scientific and others are more embedded in the politics of feminism and gender equality goals. Admittedly, however, science and politics are thoroughly intertwined in the study of gender.

In this first section of the chapter I address the science of comparing women and men in terms of (a) growth and methodological change in the research, (b) magnitude and consistency of sex differences, (c) increasing emphasis on variability of sex differences, and (d) accuracy of gender stereotypes in relation to sex comparison findings. To appreciate the intertwining of these four issues, readers above all must understand that the purpose of much research on sex-related differences and similarities of the past three decades has not been the classic mission of demonstrating intrinsic attributes of women or men, but one of showing the power of the immediate situation and of socially embedded gender norms to shape difference or similarity

(Wood & Eagly, 2010). Nonetheless, this chapter shows that, compared to 1995, it is a decidedly changed *scientific* landscape in which researchers now examine differences and similarities between the sexes. In the second section of the chapter I introduce the changed *political* landscape by examining (a) the politicized debates that have opposed feminism and evolutionary psychology, (b) the advantages of some sex differences for women, and (c) the continuing lack of consensus about sex and gender terminology.

## SCIENCE REDUX

### ***Growth and Methodological Change of Research that Compares the Sexes***

Since the publication of my 1995 science and politics article, scientific research on sex-related differences has not merely continued but has accelerated in psychology. In the 17 years since the publication of the article, the PsycINFO database has logged 36,353 additional journal articles that it has classified by the index term *human sex differences*, a designation indicating that one of an article's major emphases is comparing the sexes. In contrast, in the 17 years prior to the article's publication, only 17,864 such articles had appeared in PsycINFO.

In addition to continuing to focus on classic areas of sex-comparison research, such as aggression, cognitive abilities, personality traits, and depression, researchers have compared the sexes in newly emerging research areas. For example, in PsycINFO the index term *human sex differences* combined with the index term *emotional intelligence* yields 90 journal articles, all appearing since 2000, and combined with the index term *functional magnetic resonance imaging* yields 60 journal articles, all since 1998 (see Fine, Chapter 4 this volume). This continuing and growing interest in sex comparisons supports my earlier claim that the area is scientifically important, in part because many psychological

theories have implications for the presence or absence of sex-related differences in particular attributes or behaviors. Moreover, these data show that the efforts of some feminist psychologists to induce researchers to abandon the mission of comparing the sexes have not succeeded.

A general methodological shift accompanying the growth of this research is the presentation of sex comparisons, not merely as means, standard deviations, and tests of significance, but also as effect sizes, which provide a common metric for judging the findings. This shift was already under way when my 1995 article appeared. Most usual for reporting sex comparisons is the *d* metric, which represents differences in units of each study's pooled standard deviation, but some authors present effect sizes in the metric of the correlation coefficient, *r*, or of percentage of variance accounted for. The use of effect sizes discourages thinking dichotomously about sex-related differences in terms such as *similar* and *different* or *more similar than different*. Instead of these imprecise terms, effect sizes define a quantitative continuum that runs from exact sameness of two groups to large differences (in the positive or negative direction; i.e., men > women or women > men). This continuum favors more accurate interpretations of the magnitude and importance of sex comparisons. Terms such as *different* and *similar* may more easily serve some of the more politicized, rhetorical goals that I discuss in the politics section of this chapter but are not nuanced enough to further scientific progress.

The potential for effect sizes to clarify sex comparisons is enhanced by the increasing attention given to findings' magnitudes across all areas of psychology. In psychological science, reporting effect sizes is now a required aspect of presentations of virtually all quantitative findings. As stated in the *Publication Manual* of the American Psychological Association (2010, p. 34), 'For the reader to appreciate the magnitude or importance of a study's findings, it is almost always necessary to include some measure of effect size in the

Results section.’ As I explain later, the inclusion of effect sizes is not a panacea that resolves the ambiguities of sex comparison research, but the practice is a step in the right direction.

The presentation of effect sizes for *all* psychological research gradually educates researchers about the range of effects that are usual and thus allows them to better interpret the magnitude of sex comparisons. This contemporary demand for universal or near-universal reporting of effect sizes resolves one of the complaints of my 1995 article, namely, that some feminist psychologists had singled out sex comparisons as uniquely deserving the presentation of effect sizes, without acknowledging that effect magnitude is important in all research. Attaching effect size information only to some classes of findings and not to others seemed to me to invite scientific bias by conveying that certain findings were somehow perilous. Now that effect sizes are routine, their meaning and importance are more widely understood and, in fact, carefully explained in virtually all introductory methods texts in psychology (e.g., Cozby, 2009).

Another general methodological trend, also initiated before my 1995 article, is the increased popularity of meta-analytic methods for integrating and interpreting the large numbers of sex-comparison findings that have accumulated in some research areas. For the 17 years that have followed the publication of my article, 308 journal articles containing meta-analyses of sex comparisons can be identified in PsycINFO, each of which typically integrated many studies. The 17 years prior to 1995 yielded only 61 such meta-analyses. The number of meta-analyses per time period has therefore more than tripled, even though the total number of articles classified by PsycINFO as pertaining to human sex differences has only doubled. When appropriately executed and reported (see Cooper, 2011; Johnson & Eagly, in press), such meta-analyses make an important contribution to the psychology of gender by exploring the magnitude, consistency, and

variability of findings and relating them to relevant psychological theories. Meta-analyses are surely not a cure-all for the ambiguities of research that compares the sexes (or for research on other topics), but they are another step in the right direction.

Despite the increasing scientific attention to sex comparisons and the greater rigor inherent in researchers’ presenting effect sizes and conducting meta-analyses, the research area has remained controversial, with supporters (e.g., Hyde & Grabe, 2008) and detractors (e.g., Marecek, 2001). This contentiousness suggests that I should dig deeper into the issues raised in my 1995 article. Therefore, I now consider the magnitude and consistency of sex differences.

### ***Magnitude and Consistency of Sex Differences***

Many psychologists continue to wonder about the size of sex-related differences: Are they large enough to be consequential in natural settings or are they ordinarily trivially small? In my 1995 article, I maintained that ‘some sex-differences findings warrant being described as large ... relative to typical phenomena examined by psychologists but that most sex comparisons are in the small-to-moderate range that appears to be more typical of psychological research’ (Eagly, 1995, p. 151). This generalization has gained support in subsequent years.

Research carried out since 1995 has continued to address the magnitude issue. Not only has the number of meta-analyses escalated, but also overarching surveys of meta-analyses have aggregated findings across individual meta-analyses. Summarizing across a large number of available meta-analyses that had compared female and male social behavior, Richard, Bond, and Stokes-Zoota (2003) concluded that sex differences were somewhat smaller ( $d = 0.26$ ) than effects averaged across social psychology as a whole ( $d = 0.45$ ). Yet, the average magnitude of the sex effects was comparable to those in several foundational research areas in social psychology, which

include effects that are ordinarily regarded as well established and are featured by writers of textbooks. For example, effects concerning attribution ( $d = 0.28$ ) and social influence ( $d = 0.26$ ) have magnitudes similar to sex comparisons. Also, in an article advocating the 'gender similarities' view that sex differences are ordinarily small, Hyde (2005, 2007) aggregated 128 meta-analytical effects representing sex comparisons in personality, social, and cognitive psychology. Hyde termed almost half of these results 'small' effects but acknowledged that larger sex differences emerged in some situations and with certain categories of behavior (e.g., motor performance, sexuality, aggression). Although these newer descriptions emphasize small size more than my 1995 statement that most sex differences are small to moderate, generalizing about the magnitudes of effects from many meta-analyses raises troubling questions.

There is reason to be wary of blanket descriptions of sex differences as often or usually small. One consideration is that the term *small* implies a lack of importance. However, small effect sizes are not necessarily unimportant in daily life. Small effects can have substantial impact when they consistently describe female and male behavior across time and situations. As explained by Abelson (1985, p. 133), '*small* variance contributions of independent variables in single-shot studies grossly understate the variance contribution in the long run' (see also Epstein, 1980; Rosenthal, 1990). Abelson showed that batting skill in major league baseball accounted for only a tiny amount of variance in single batting performances but considerable variance when cumulated over time and players. Similarly, in Eagly and Johnson's (1990) leadership style meta-analysis, the tendency for women to manifest a more democratic and less autocratic style than men was larger when based on measures that aggregated behaviors across more observations. In general, if studies' measures are not 'single-shot' but aggregated across multiple observations of behaviors, effect magnitudes are larger and sometimes dramatically larger

(Eagly, 2009). In addition, when experiments are designed to have particularly weak manipulations or difficult-to-influence dependent variables, even small effects can be impressive and important (Prentice & Miller, 1992). These considerations raise serious concerns about routinely interpreting effect sizes in terms of Cohen's (1988) guidelines of 0.20 for small, 0.50 for medium, and 0.80 for large. These guidelines as well as others that have been proposed (e.g., Hemphill, 2003) are at best blunt instruments.

Another consideration in interpreting large-scale overviews, such as those by Richard and colleagues (2003) and Hyde (2005), is that they were not theory-driven and thus did not distinguish between the behavioral domains that theoretically should or should not yield sex differences. As one example of theory-consistent findings, in masculine organizational contexts women leaders generally appear less effective than male leaders, and in feminine organizational contexts the direction of this difference reverses to favor women (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Although combining over both contexts yields a near-zero effect, merely citing this overall finding ignores the important implications of the meta-analysis for the psychology of gender (Eagly, 2011). When meta-analysts merely aggregate findings across one or more broad behavioral categories by collapsing findings across contexts and behaviors for which theories hold that sex differences are more or less likely, substantial theory-relevant effects are swept into uninformative general conclusions. In contrast, variation of sex difference findings can allow theories to be tested and foster new theories that disentangle the multifaceted influences that affect the behaviors, personality, and cognitive abilities of women and men (Eagly, 2009; Wood & Eagly, 2010).

In an article that displays the limitations of calling attention to meta-analytic means averaged over all available studies, Else-Quest, Hyde, and Linn (2010) emphasized male-female similarity in their excellent cross-national meta-analysis of mathematics achievement. In support of similarity, the mean



effect sizes that they calculated across all nations were small ( $d \leq 0.15$ ). However, underlying these means was dramatically large national variation in sex-difference effect sizes, with  $d$ s ranging from  $-0.42$  (female advantage) to  $0.40$  (male advantage). Because similarity held in only some nations, the critical lesson from this meta-analysis is not male–female similarity but cross-national variability in findings. Specifically, as Else-Quest et al. (2010) showed, the magnitude and direction of sex differences was related to national variation in opportunity structures for girls and women, especially to sex ratios of enrollments in high school and universities and to women’s access to research jobs. Where girls and women are as well or better educated than boys and men and have equitable access to jobs that reward mathematical competence, they typically perform as well or better than men and boys on tests of mathematics achievement.

Consistency of sex comparison findings is one of the issues I discussed in my 1995 article by raising doubts about the view that this area of research produces findings that are especially inconsistent across studies and contexts. From a scientific perspective, the important issue is not whether findings are consistent but whether inconsistencies are interpretable from the perspective of one or more theories. With unreliable measures and small sample sizes, findings can be inconsistent because they contain large amounts of error variance – in other words, they can be randomly inconsistent. In contrast, meta-analyses typically show that variability across studies is systematically related to at least some study attributes. For example, the cross-national inconsistencies of the Else-Quest et al. (2010) findings proved to be predictable from the point of view of theories such as social role theory (Eagly, 1987) that emphasize that the psychology of women and men is influenced by each sex’s position in the social structure.

Complexity of findings is not unique to the psychology of gender but is common in most areas of psychology. Some have argued that

virtually all psychological phenomena vary across settings, participant attributes, and research methods (e.g., McGuire, 1983). It is this contextual variation that theorists of social behavior and meta-analysts of empirical literatures are well advised to address. Given substantial contextual variation, it is of limited value for reviewers to claim merely that sex comparisons have a particular overall direction and magnitude, be that small or large. Researchers should instead also focus on the patterning of difference and similarity and build theories to address this variability. They should also carefully examine studies’ quality to identify features such as psychometrically inferior measures that may contribute to findings’ unreliability.

### ***Emphasis on Variability in Sex Differences***

Consistent with the view that research findings are usually contextual, researchers have increasingly focused on variability in the outcomes of sex comparisons. Even prior to 1995, many psychological researchers of sex differences had emphasized the moderation of the results of sex comparisons by individual differences in gender identity and by the social context. From this perspective, sex differences can be absent or small in main effects averaged across other variables but emerge more strongly in interactions. Researchers of androgyny such as Bem (1974) and Spence and Helmreich (1978) took the view that gender identity, composed of personally defined masculinity and femininity, is more important than biological sex in effects on social behavior. In an elegant formulation that emphasized in addition the normative regulation of sex-related behavior, Deaux and Major (1987) argued that women and men can be different or similar depending on the accessibility of gender identities and the salience of gender role norms.

Since 1995 the understanding that individuals’ gender identity accounts for variability in sex-difference findings has progressed beyond a sole emphasis on self-definitions in

stereotypically masculine and feminine traits. Researchers have also considered interdependence in self-construals, with a feminine mode emphasizing interdependence with others in close relationships and a masculine mode emphasizing personal independence (Cross & Madson, 1997) or collective interdependence focused on oneself in the context of teams and larger groupings (Gardner & Gabriel, 2004). Yet another type of gender identity pertains to the importance that people accord to defining themselves as a member of the social category of men or women (e.g., Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997). These additional gender identity constructs have expanded the possibilities for understanding interindividual variation in sex differences (see Wood & Eagly, 2009). Also, many researchers have continued to emphasize the situational malleability of gender-typed aspects of the self (e.g., Ryan, David, & Reynolds, 2004; Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006).

In further efforts to understand variability in sex differences, researchers have considered how identities pertaining to qualities such as race, ethnicity, social class, disability, and sexual orientation intersect gender identities, an issue typically labeled by the term *intersectionality* (Cole, 2009; Landrine & Russo, 2010; Shields, 2008). This issue surfaced in feminism's *third wave*, which followed the second wave of the 1960s through the early 1980s (see Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2007). Third-wave feminists criticized earlier psychologists' failure to sufficiently take into account of the heterogeneity of women. Although a few feminists had earlier raised issues of race and gender (e.g., Torrey, 1979), intersectionality has only recently become a high-profile topic among psychologists who study gender. This emphasis coincides with a broader movement within psychology to consider the cultural differentiation of psychological processes (e.g., Kitayama & Cohen, 2007) and to move beyond research participants who are educated members of a Western, industrialized, rich, and democratic society (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

Researchers have continued to develop understanding of the situational variability of sex differences and similarities. Particularly important is the increasing appreciation of the subtlety with which others' expectations are communicated so that they produce gender-normative behavior. Expectations are not necessarily communicated explicitly, and subtle cues communicated through priming and behavioral mimicry can foster such behavior (see review by Wood & Eagly, 2010). An emphasis on situational variability is common not only in social psychology but also in developmental psychology (e.g., Hilliard & Liben, 2010; Karniol & Gal-Disegni, 2009). In general, as understanding of individual differences and situational pressures has expanded, theories of gender have taken into account more of the variability in sex differences and similarities.

### ***Methodological Biases and Artifacts in Sex Comparison Research***

Various questions about artifacts have arisen in relation to research on sex comparisons, some of which I discussed in my 1995 article. These questions reflected prior critiques of psychology by feminist psychologists that helped to increase awareness about potential artifacts and that addressed broader epistemological questions (e.g., Basow, 1986; Riger, 1992; Sherif, 1979). As Riger (1992, p. 737) wrote, 'Epistemological debates in recent years have shattered the traditional picture of science as neutral, disinterested, and value free and have replaced it with a view of knowledge as socially constructed.'

This feminist critique was part of a broad transformation in psychology whereby many issues of bias came to the fore from the 1960s onward. As a result of an increasing awareness of multiple sources of invalidity (Campbell, 1994; Campbell & Stanley, 1963), few researchers still operate in a positivist mode that views scientists as directly mapping external reality. It is my observation that researchers in psychology, including those who specialize in the psychology of gender, generally function

in a postpositivist mode that acknowledges many forms of bias that can affect research, including researchers' own values (Douglas, 2009). However, this recognition has led, not to hopelessness about the contribution of science, but to efforts to identify and control bias and, more broadly, to an understanding of science as a complex social interactive activity involving persuasion and negotiation (Zammito, 2004). As suggested by the ever-increasing production of psychological research, including research on the psychology of women and gender (Eagly, Eaton, Rose, Riger, & McHugh, 2012), most investigators continue to regard scientific inquiry as a valid approach to understanding mind and behavior, despite its vulnerabilities to multiple forms of invalidity.

In general, meta-analytic reviews have facilitated the discovery of bias in psychological research because the analysis of study quality, including potential artifacts, is one of their important features. By classifying studies according to the presence or absence of potential sources of bias, analysts can relate biases to the outcomes of studies. For example, in a meta-analysis of experiments on memory for attitude-relevant information, Eagly, Chen, Chaiken, and Shaw-Barnes (1999) found that findings differed depending on whether the coding of recall measures was known to be blind and whether recognition measures were corrected for bias. In this research literature, as in many other literatures in which findings had once seemed quite inconsistent and confusing, it took a meta-analysis to discover how important it is to take into account issues of artifact and bias.

In research on sex-related differences, as in other areas of psychology, there has been particular concern about so-called 'file drawer' effects, whereby only a biased sample of research findings may be available in the published literature, generally biased in favor of findings that confirm researchers' favored hypotheses (Sutton, 2009). Consistent with this emphasis, a traditional argument, noted in my 1995 article, is that sex comparison findings are biased in favor of larger differences

because they are published only if they produce a significant result. However, I argued in response that sex comparisons are often subsidiary findings in studies of social behavior and personality, making their statistical significance largely irrelevant to articles' acceptability for publication. Nonetheless, researchers' willingness or unwillingness to report sex comparisons in their articles could lead to overestimating or underestimating of sex differences.

Surely there are multiple sources of potential bias in producing the sample of studies that appears in a meta-analysis. Therefore, it is good news that since my 1995 article, statisticians have proposed increasingly sophisticated methods of estimating and correcting for publication bias (see Borenstein, Hedges, Higgins, & Rothstein, 2009; Ferguson & Brannick, 2012). Although these newer methods were rarely applied prior to my 1995 article, current high-quality meta-analyses do routinely include these analyses.

Finally, research on the psychology of gender provides an attractive opportunity to examine scientists' own identities as a potential source of bias in research, in this case their gender (Eagly, 2012). Like other people, scientists can exhibit *ingroup bias* based on their gender, which then can influence research in many ways. In social psychology, bias in favor of the groups in which people have membership is assumed to emerge from a need for positive social identity (Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010). Because social identifications are an important aspect of the self-concept, people are motivated to evaluate their own social groups more favorably than other groups (Turner, 2000). Empirically, ingroup bias is well established across a range of experimental paradigms (see meta-analyses by Bettencourt, Charlton, Dorr, & Hume, 2001; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992).

How might ingroup bias affect researchers? Researchers may be pleased or displeased by the results of a comparison between male and female research participants, depending on whether it made their own sex look better or worse than the other sex. In evidence that such



effects occur, experiments manipulating the favorability of research findings for each sex found that participants of both sexes were more positive about findings that portrayed their own sex favorably and presumably affirmed their gender identity (Morton, Haslam, Postmes, & Ryan, 2006). This result was *more* pronounced among participants who possessed at least some scientific training, thus failing to support the idea that scientific training or knowledge mitigates this form of attitudinal selectivity. Such a bias could account for the tendencies that are sometimes observed in meta-analyses for the sex of studies' authors to predict studies' outcomes, generally in the direction that authors of each sex obtain or publish more findings that favor their own gender and thereby shore up their gender identities (e.g., Anderson & Leaper, 1998; Eagly & Carli, 1981; Wood, 1987).

Given a potential for researchers to manifest ingroup bias, the presence of more female researchers would serve as a corrective to men's presumed ingroup bias. Although it is implausible that women are any freer than men from ingroup bias, their inclusion among researchers would lessen the likely prior tendency toward pro-male bias. Women's inclusion can also raise uncomfortable issues about biases to the extent that they produce different findings than men or advocate different theories. Ethnic, racial, and social class diversity among scientists would similarly add new ingroup biases that could counter traditional biases that may have thrived unchecked when psychological science was pursued primarily by white men.

### ***Accuracy of Gender Stereotypes in Relation to Sex Comparison Findings***

The idea that gender stereotypes are at least roughly accurate raised the hackles of readers of my 1995 article to the extent they believed that stereotype accuracy would dash hopes that psychologists' research findings would put an end to (or at least restrain) gender stereotypes.

It was a popular belief that gender stereotypes are destructive forces that can be fought with research findings that emerge from sex comparisons – that is, from evidence that these differences are small or non-existent (e.g., Hyde, 1994). From that perspective, it is understandable that some were upset by my claim. Gender stereotypes certainly do have considerable power to foster traditional roles because they are embodied in others' expectations and, to some extent, in individuals' own gender identities (Wood & Eagly, 2010). Therefore, it was a hopeful idea that null findings or small differences in sex-comparison research might blunt stereotypes' power, to the extent that such findings received publicity. However, these ideas are altogether too simple. In fact, research has continued to provide evidence for the overall accuracy of social perceivers' gender stereotypes.

Numerous projects have related stereotypes to the sex differences and similarities established in psychological research. In one approach, reviewed in my 1995 article, several meta-analyses had obtained judges' estimates of female and male behavior for each of the reviewed studies and related these to the effect sizes for each study's behavioral sex differences (e.g., Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Eagly & Steffen, 1986). These correlations were positive and significant and illustrate the ability of people to take social contexts into account, given that the studies differed widely in their contexts. Additionally compelling are correlations between student judges' estimates and meta-analytic sex differences as computed across many individual meta-analyses (e.g., Swim, 1994). These analyses have shown that beliefs about the direction and magnitude of sex differences are moderately correlated with the findings of meta-analyses that compared the sexes on numerous personality traits, abilities, and social behaviors. In other words, gender stereotypes accurately predict sex differences demonstrated in psychological research. These findings are altogether reasonable from the perspective of a nomological net that considers stereotypes to

be data-driven representations of social reality that become consensual gender roles that in turn influence behavior (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Wood & Eagly, 2010).

One excellent demonstration of this positive relation between stereotypes and the findings of meta-analyses of sex comparisons appeared prior to my 1995 article (Swim, 1994). Subsequently, researchers have published other projects based on similar methods (Briton & Hall, 1995; Hall & Carter, 1999; Halpern, Straight, & Stephenson, 2011). For example, in the Halpern et al. (2011) study of stereotypes about cognitive sex differences, participants estimated that males perform better than females on tests of mental rotations of objects, and research had established this sex difference (Halpern et al., 2011). In addition, Hall and Carter's (1999) project established not only a positive relationship between gender stereotypes and a wide range of meta-analytic findings involving sex comparisons, but also the greater accuracy of gender stereotypes among research participants who were more interpersonally sensitive and believed more in the accuracy of their social perceptions.

Primary research has produced other evidence of the accuracy of gender stereotypes. For example, gender stereotypic beliefs were correlated with sex differences in experiences of emotions of anger, fear, love, joy, and sadness (Grossman & Wood, 1993). In addition, research participants successfully estimated the distribution of the sexes into occupations (Cejka & Eagly, 1999) and the social attitudes held by men and women on a wide range of topics, as assessed by nationally representative surveys (Diekmann, Eagly, & Kulesa, 2002).

All in all, there is an impressive amount of evidence that people do quite a good job of estimating group differences between women and men. It is in this sense that gender stereotypes are accurate. Yet, there is evidence of some specific biases (e.g., Diekmann et al., 2002). Also, motivations to defend oneself or one's own group may fuel especially stringent attention to the less positive aspects of the

stereotypes of other groups (e.g., Sinclair & Kunda, 2000). Nonetheless, stereotypes are not invented from whole cloth to protect the privileges of one's own group or to enhance personal self-esteem. Instead, *correspondent inference* from observed behavior produces stereotypes, which become consensual through shared observations and then enable various forms of motivated reasoning.

A related question is whether gender stereotypes, although generally accurate, exaggerate sex differences. Although social psychologists have argued that cognitive processes involved in stereotyping (e.g., categorization, assimilation of individuals to stereotypes) may exaggerate real differences (e.g., Tajfel, 1981; Wilder, 1984), such findings have not consistently emerged in accuracy research. Empirical support for the exaggeration of sex-related differences is mixed, with some studies showing overestimation (Allen, 1995; Martin, 1987) and others showing underestimation (e.g., Cejka & Eagly, 1999; Halpern et al., 2011; Swim, 1994). Of course, both overestimation and underestimation are errors, indicating that social perceivers' estimates of sex differences are less than perfectly accurate.

Some psychologists no doubt find the overall accuracy of gender stereotypes non-surprising. Categorizing people as female and male and attaching stereotypes to these categories would not be useful unless these processes achieved at least rough accuracy. In fact, social psychologists have long maintained that most stereotypes of social groups have at least a kernel of truth that is perhaps small (Katz & Braly, 1933) or perhaps not so small (Jussim, 2012; Lee, Jussim, & McCauley, 1995). Moreover, in contrast to seldom-encountered social groups, virtually everyone observes women and men very frequently, yielding myriad opportunities to correct biased beliefs and to develop nuanced beliefs that take situational contingencies into account (Fiedler & Walther, 2004). From this perspective, gender stereotypes are bound by the very familiar social realities that they represent and likely are more

accurate than ethnic and racial stereotypes and certainly than most stereotypes about foreign nationalities.

Even though people have generally good descriptive knowledge of sex-related differences and similarities, stereotypes are of course not accurate for predicting individuals who deviate from group averages. Therefore, psychologists routinely point out that discussions of accuracy should differentiate the accuracy of beliefs about a category versus beliefs about individual category members (Ryan, 2002). Beliefs about groups may be quite accurate based on group averages (e.g., women have superior emotional intelligence) but inaccurate when applied to individuals within the groups (e.g., Jane is a dunce when it comes to understanding other people's emotions). Therefore, the practical problem posed by stereotypes is not their overall inaccuracy but perceivers' tendency to overgeneralize by applying them most of the time, at least as a first approximation (see Jussim, Cain, Crawford, Harber, & Cohen, 2009).

To argue that stereotypes are generally accurate is not to claim that they are benign in their effects on social life. In fact, as shown in research on stereotype threat, stereotypes typically recreate the very differences that they represent (Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). Moreover, gender stereotypes limit options for both women and men. For example, the belief that women are less agentic than men limits their access to many roles, especially leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). And the idea that men are less communal than women limits their access to roles involving caring and empathy. Therefore, it is understandable that feminist researchers hoped that research findings would threaten the cultural viability of gender stereotypes.

If stereotypes are not readily countered through research findings, what can be done to reduce gender stereotyping? From the perspective of social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012), gender stereotypes are not arbitrary or random. Instead, they are firmly rooted in a society's division of labor

whereby people observe women and men engaged in different types of activities (Koenig & Eagly, 2013). From this perspective, gender stereotypes are not fixed but can be changed through changes in the typical social roles of women and men (Wood & Eagly, 2010, 2012).

In summary, subsequent to my 1995 article, important scientific trends have emerged, and earlier trends have intensified. Research that compares the sexes has become more popular, with a greater emphasis on effect sizes that indicate the magnitude of sex comparisons. Meta-analytic summaries of research have become more common. In addition, researchers' theories and predictions about sex differences often take individual differences and features of the social context into account, with the result that predictions commonly take the form of interactions rather than main effects. Also, issues of bias continue to be raised, with progress in estimating and correcting for publication bias in meta-analyses. Finally, research has continued to establish the overall accuracy of gender stereotypes.

## POLITICS REDUX

Over time, the political landscape of research that compares the sexes has changed as feminist positions regarding sex-related differences and similarities have become more varied than they were in the past. Some of the cross tone of my 1995 article emerged from my annoyance with the one-sided view that research that compared the sexes is objectionable because it always results in disadvantage for women (e.g., Baumeister, 1988; McHugh, Koeske, & Frieze, 1986; Unger & Crawford, 1992). As I show in the remainder of this chapter, political and scientific changes have made this view less tenable and also complicated discussions of terminology for referring to sex comparisons.

The fact that an absence of psychological sex differences was once an overriding preference of many feminists in psychology accounted

for some of the controversial quality of my 1995 article. As I pointed out in that article, feminist researchers had often challenged claims about sex differences, both in the first-wave feminist movement in the early decades of the 20th century and in the second-wave movement of the late 20th century. This position was appropriate given the emphasis of many early psychologists on women's presumed intellectual inferiority and single-minded dedication to the maternal role (see review by Shields, 1975). However, these views about the scientific weaknesses and political threat of research that compared the sexes had seemed to become frozen in the minds of many feminist psychologists and impervious to the themes of contemporary research. I thus maintained that 'Feminist writing of the 1970s generally portrayed research purportedly demonstrating sex differences as largely prescientific and obviously faulty or, if the research was more modern, as riddled with artifacts, methodological deficiencies, and unexplained inconsistencies in findings' (Eagly, 1995, p. 149). Mired in early findings of dubious scientific merit, that view neglected the varied themes that had developed in the 1980s and beyond, including social psychologists' typical focus on the power of the situation (e.g., Deaux & Major, 1987) as well as the emergence of some differences that could be interpreted as advantaging women.

Further complicating the politics and science of comparing women and men is the emergence of evolutionary psychology, with its Darwinian claim that women and men are different in behavioral domains in which they faced different selection pressures (e.g., Buss, 1995; Byrd-Craven & Geary, Chapter 7 this volume). Although evolutionary psychologists do not maintain that the sex differences that presumably follow from these selection pressures are invariant, they emphasize a universal psychology and the different innate natures of men and women (e.g., Geary, 2010; Low, 2000). The particular sex differences that they emphasize (e.g., men's dominance,

women's preference for men with resources) preclude gender equality in society.

The feminist commitment to furthering gender equality has provided an opening for evolutionary psychologists to critique feminist research as politically motivated and therefore biased (Buss, 1996). Feminists in turn have accused evolutionary scientists of adopting an androcentric perspective that only thinly disguises system-justifying ideological biases (e.g., Martin, 2003). It is not surprising that both feminists and evolutionary psychologists possess values that influence their scientific activity, as do virtually all scientists (Zammito, 2004). Nevertheless, accusations of political bias are non-productive in science. Whether ideas come from political preference, observations of everyday life, intuition, or prior science, they should be scientifically tested, subjected to methodological critique, and replicated to test their generalizability (see Eagly & Wood, 2011).

### ***Advantages of Some Sex Differences for Women***

One of the political shifts since 1995 is that more sex-related differences emerging from research appear to offer some advantages for women. Even before 1995 all feminist psychologists were not of one mind on the subject of sex differences: some female-advantage claims were present in this earlier research. Feminist psychologists who were friendly to the idea of sex-related differences had featured aspects of communal sex differences, which ordinarily reveal ways in which women exceed men in some culturally admirable qualities. Notably, albeit without explicit comparisons to men, Gilligan (1982) portrayed women's moral reasoning as following an ethic of care as demonstrated by a humane and relational approach to moral judgment. This claim received modest support much later in Jaffee and Hyde's (2000) meta-analysis of the empirical literature on moral reasoning, which produced a mean effect size of  $d = -0.28$  in the direction predicted by Gilligan. Positive female behavior had also

emerged in group performance settings, where women's more inclusive interpersonal style facilitated group performance at collaborative tasks (Wood, 1987). Additionally, in meta-analytic findings, women appeared to be superior to men at perceiving non-verbal emotion cues, thereby manifesting an important aspect of social sensitivity (Hall, 1978, 1984).

Subsequent to my 1995 article, other sex differences with favorable implications for women have come into view in comprehensive meta-analyses. In particular, *female advantage* themes emerged in leadership research whereby women are increasingly praised for having excellent leadership skills. In my 1995 article I had cited some qualitative evidence favoring this idea (Helgesen, 1990). Since then, meta-analytic evidence has shown that women exceed men in manifesting leadership styles associated with effective managerial performance (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Although these sex differences are small, the fact that they are present at all provides a critique of the well-established favoring of men for leadership roles. Also, one quality that is especially emphasized in contemporary discussions as important to management is *emotional intelligence* (e.g., Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Meta-analytic research has found that women score substantially higher than men on performance-based measures of emotional intelligence ( $d = 0.52$ ; Joseph & Newman, 2010). This finding should contribute to workplace gains for women, although perhaps primarily in jobs requiring emotional labor. Given that the cultural construal of leadership has shifted (and may continue to shift) away from extreme masculinity toward greater androgyny (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011), women's emotional intelligence and other culturally feminine social skills may prove to be increasingly advantageous in leadership contexts.

Health and medical research is another domain where many feminists now welcome research that compares the sexes and, in fact,

encourage greater attention to sex differences (see Epstein, 2007). In this area, the discovery of differences can serve gender equity, consistent with the claim that sex differences have been wrongly ignored in medical research, treatment, and social policy, at least in part because scientists typically studied white men and generalized these results to everyone (see Hegarty, Parslow, Ansara, & Quick, Chapter 3 this volume). Therefore, activists call for drug treatments and other interventions that take into account the many ways in which women differ from men. In response to a neglect of these issues, the Society for Women's Health Research founded the Organization for the Study of Sex Differences, that 'seeks to enhance the knowledge of sex/gender differences by facilitating interdisciplinary communication and collaboration among scientists and clinicians of diverse backgrounds' (Organization for the Study of Sex Differences, 2012). Signaling favorable attention to sex differences, this organization's highly publicized 2011 conference was titled 'What a Difference an X Makes'. Thus, in the domain of health and medical research, feminists now welcome the discovery of sex differences because of their potential to improve healthcare for women.

### **Terminology: Sex or Gender?**

A final issue, one that reflects both political and scientific considerations, is the continuing lack of clarity about the proper language for referring to comparisons of women and men. Psychologists lack consensus on this matter, and the partial consensus that seemed to exist in the 1990s appears to be eroding (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2011). In the 1970s, feminist researchers had recommended separating *sex* from *gender* to distinguish between sex as referring to female and male biology and gender as referring to the cultural construction of male and female categories (e.g., Unger, 1979). A key purpose of this distinction, sensible in terms of the politics of the 20th century 'second wave' of the feminist movement, was to challenge the idea that



observable sex differences generally arise from intrinsic, biological causes and thus may be impervious to social influences. Beginning in the 1980s, *gender* became the favored term for cultural distinctions between the sexes and *sex* for biological distinctions (see Haig, 2004).

This seemingly orderly resolution of the relevant science by sex = biology and gender = culture implied that the results of research comparing males and females could be classified into nature and nurture categories (Wood & Eagly, 2010). In subsequent decades, the awkwardness of this distinction has intensified as psychologists have come to recognize the complex intertwining of nature and nurture in producing the behavior of women and men (e.g., Berenbaum, Blakemore, & Beltz, 2011). Not only is causation often mixed, but also it is continually negotiated by researchers who proceed with differing methods and hypotheses.

Alternatives are in place for ending this separation of nature and nurture. One alternative is to use gender as a general-purpose term for the results of all female–male comparisons, regardless of any causal implications (e.g., Lips, 2008). Then the term *gender* substitutes for *sex*, with male–female differences labeled *gender differences*, although this label suggests a tilt toward sociocultural causation. Strict implementation of this solution would require labeling as gender differences purely biological comparisons of, for example, male and female anatomy although some advocates of *gender difference* allow *sex difference* for these comparisons (e.g., Lips, 2008). A second alternative is to use the sex and gender terms randomly, without any causal implications (e.g., Hines, 2009). However, as Glasser and Smith (2008) noted, this solution offends the principle that science should foster conceptual and terminological precision.

A third alternative, which I have adopted, preserves the words *sex* and *gender* as scientifically precise terms. One leg of this solution is to use *sex* by its common-language meaning of male and female as categories (e.g., ‘into

which humans and most other living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions’; Oxford English Dictionary, 2011). This categorization is based on a biological distinction between differing chromosomes and associated hormonal and reproductive differences even though classification is ordinarily a social act based on personal self-assessments or observers’ judgments (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). This solution uses the term *sex difference* to refer to any differences between persons in the female and male categories, with no causal implications. This usage is traditional in psychology and is reflected, for example, in the title of Maccoby and Jacklin’s classic book *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (1974). Nevertheless, some psychologists may prefer closely related terms such as *sex-related* or *sex-correlated* differences.

The other leg of my solution of the sex/gender conundrum is to reserve the term *gender* for the meanings that cultures and individuals ascribe to the male and female categories. Phenomena such as stereotypes and social roles, which are cultural constructions, are properly referred to as *gender stereotypes* and *gender roles*. Similarly, the personal meanings that people ascribe to themselves as male or female are named *gender identities*. This way of using sex and gender preserves gender for phenomena that are less ambiguously cultural and allows sex to refer to social category membership.

Lack of consensus on use of the terms *sex* and *gender* should not be embarrassing to researchers, although in the absence of consensus, they have the burden of defining their own use of sex and gender terms. In this spirit, I defined these terms in a footnote in my 1995 *American Psychologist* article and have continued to do so in many subsequent articles.

Above all, researchers should not agonize over sex/gender terminology. It is unwise for gender researchers, journal editors, or the APA *Publication Manual* to attempt to impose their terminological preferences, given principled rationales for various usages. Terminology does matter, but consensus sometimes has to

emerge over time. Discontent with deploying *sex* and *gender* for nature–nurture distinctions will no doubt grow in psychology, further fracturing the terminological understanding forged in the feminist movement of the 1970s. Eventually a new consensus will emerge.

## CONCLUSION

This retrospective consideration of the issues that I explored in my 1995 science and politics article reveals a changed scientific and political landscape. Scientifically the study of sex differences and similarities has increased in volume and sophistication. The comparative study of women and men, along with many other aspects of the psychology of gender, has thrived and become incorporated into the mainstream of psychology (Eagly et al., 2012). The profile of this research is particularly prominent in the *Psychological Bulletin*, psychology's most elite review journal, which has published more than 50 meta-analyses of sex differences and similarities. This proliferation of meta-analyses in this and other journals has created new opportunities for overviews of meta-analyses (e.g., Hyde, 2005) and studies of the relation between gender stereotypes and meta-analytic findings (e.g., Hall & Carter, 1999).

The quite moderate position that I took on the typical magnitudes of sex differences has continued to be supported by new research. However, from the perspective of many gender theories, it is generally not the magnitude of findings but their variability across individual attributes, features of situations, and aspects of culture and social structure that are of primary interest (Wood & Eagly, 2010, 2012). Issues of artifact also remain relevant to gender research, although progress has been made in relation to the 'file drawer' problem that was raised in relation to reports of sex comparisons.

The position that I took on the overall accuracy of gender stereotypes has continued to receive support from overviews relating people's beliefs about men and women to

scientific findings. This positive relation need not be discouraging. Instead, it points psychologists to a more meaningful mission than the quixotic effort to use research findings to shatter stereotypes. Instead, the feminist endeavor should be directed to changing stereotypes by broadening the opportunities for women and men to enter non-traditional roles.

The political landscape has changed too in that feminists less commonly express skepticism about the value of comparing the sexes. Textbooks on the psychology of gender in fact feature this comparative research, along with other emphases (e.g., Helgeson, 2012). Female advantage findings have made it more difficult to argue that sex-difference findings generally disadvantage women. On the contrary, in some domains, these findings contribute to feminist advocacy, especially regarding women's access to leadership positions and to better healthcare.

All in all, I have not strayed very far from the main points that I presented in my 1995 science and politics article. Yet, changes in research findings and methods and in gender politics have eased several of the concerns that I expressed in that article. As feminist psychology has become more varied in its emphases, it no longer presents a majority position opposing research that compares women and men. Moreover, gender research is distributed across the subfields of psychology and is not published mainly in explicitly feminist journals (Eagly et al., 2012). Research on gender and women now reflects many theoretical perspectives as the study of gender has become established within many subareas of psychology, especially those devoted to the study of social behavior, personality and individual differences, development, and applied issues (Eagly et al., 2012). Given this changed situation, had I not written the 1995 article, I would not now be motivated to write such an article. And if I were to write such an article, I do not think that it would be as controversial as it was in 1995. Then it proved to be so instantly controversial that the editors of *American Psychologist* agreed to publish it only accompanied by commentaries



discussing the issues raised in the article (Buss, 1995; Hyde & Plant, 1995; Marecek, 1995).

Have I remained pleased that I wrote the article? Yes, although the article should be understood in terms of its particular historical context. Its citations (252 in Web of Science, 277 in PsycNET, and 556 in Google Scholar) suggest that it has been moderately influential. I believe that the article has facilitated some of the trends that I have discussed in describing the changes in science and politics of comparing women and men.

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# Androcentrism: Changing the Landscape without Leveling the Playing Field?

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## INTRODUCTION

In some countries, signs in buildings depict humans as skirt-wearers and trouser-wearers to direct them to one of two types of bathroom, but only trouser-wearers are depicted on the fire exit signs. An alien visitor to our planet could reasonably wonder at this arrangement, and might even ask where the skirt-wearers go when the buildings burn. Had they read the human philosopher Hegel, that alien might describe the skirt-wearers as ‘others’ in this system, because they face a dilemma about how to *exist* in this system. The skirt-wearers must, in the context of a fire, either recognize themselves as trouser-wearers or cease to exist altogether. In contrast, the trouser-wearers immediately know which exit to use and can live blissfully unaware of the privilege they enjoy.

Such unequal states of affairs are *androcentric*. Below we historicize definitions of androcentrism and name the problems inherent in those definitions. We describe how critiques

of androcentrism, by psychologists and others, have re-mapped cultures in domains such as work, medicine, psychological science, and the law. We argue that these changes have *altered the landscape* but not *leveled the playing field*. As our example of signage demonstrates, androcentrism remains built into many human cultures. Moreover, it is hard to imagine – and harder to bring about – an *ideal* world free of the kind of misrepresentation of which ‘androcentrism’ is an example.

## DEFINING ANDROCENTRISM

The most influential definition of androcentrism in psychology describes androcentrism as:

the privileging of male experience and the ‘othering’ of female experience; that is, males and male experience are treated as a neutral standard or norm for the culture of the species as a whole, and females and female experience are treated as a sex-specific deviation from that allegedly universal standard. (Bem, 1993, p. 41)



For Bem, androcentrism was one of three problematic ‘lenses of gender’ or ways of viewing the world in terms of gender that characterized modern US culture, the other two being *gender polarization*, ‘the historically crude perception that women and men are fundamentally different from one another’, and *biological essentialism*, ‘which rationalizes and legitimizes both other lenses by treating them as the natural and inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological natures of women and men’ (p. 2). Bem aimed her account of androcentrism to go beyond naming ‘men’s power’ to identify ‘*how* their power is culturally and psychologically reproduced’ (Bem, 1993, pp. 40–41, emphasis in original). Bem (1993, p. 42) offered the image of ‘males [sic] at the center of the universe looking out at reality from behind their own eyes and describing what they see from an egocentric – or androcentric – point of view’. This ‘radial’ image of power that operates by some people’s view of others is not unique to Bem. Foucault’s (1975/1977) model of ‘disciplinary power,’ – the kind of power that operates through the human sciences, was exemplified by the prison design known as ‘the panopticon’. The panopticon also had a radial design, and prisoners were individualized and separated into cells where they were subject to ceaseless surveillance from an unseen jailor. Both Bem’s and Foucault’s imagination of power highlight how being made visible can be both a cause and an effect of disempowerment. Bem described two particular consequences of the androcentric conflation of the ‘male gaze’ with objectivity: reality became defined both in terms of similarity or difference from men, and reality became defined in terms of its *functional* significance for men. She attributed androcentric thought in American culture particularly to four cultural discourses: ‘Judeo-Christian’ theology, Ancient Greek philosophy, Freudian psychoanalytic theory, and American equal rights law.

Bem (1993) cited both Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (2011 [1949]) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s essay *The Man Made World*

(1971 [1911]) as particularly influential to her thinking. Beauvoir did not use the term ‘androcentrism,’ but she drew on Hegel to argue that othering was ‘the fundamental category of human thought’ (p. 6), and that ‘woman’ had been the ‘other’ of much Western thought. Beauvoir argued particularly that men’s dependence on women had been systematically forgotten, creating that enduring illusion of men’s greater autonomy and agency (Williams & Best, 1982). Such othering had led some women to internalize the view that they are dependent on men, and to voluntarily choose a subordinate position that seemed ‘natural’ or appropriately ‘feminine.’ This claim is particularly important for psychologists, because it defines androcentrism not simply in terms of gender differences in women’s and men’s views, but assumes that androcentrism is a consequential dominant ‘system-justifying’ ideology (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004) to which all people adhere to greater or lesser extents. The greater objectification of women than of men exemplifies such power, and both women and men participate in objectification (Moradi & Yu-Ping, 2008). Beauvoir maintained that women needed to struggle against the definitions of their gender to exercise autonomy, yet she was optimistic that, even in this situation, woman ‘being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other’ (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 17).

In a much earlier work, Gilman critiqued the ‘androcentric’ culture of her time, in which ‘men’s nature’ had become an over-valued default, and ‘women’s nature’ positioned as a deviation from that norm. Her work was situated in time and place, and it drew on social Darwinist discourse of its time to analyze androcentrism (c.f. Hofstadter, 1955). In so doing, it colluded with other kinds of ‘-centrisms,’ through ethnocentric reference to ‘primitive’ and ‘civilized’ cultures, for example. Gilman (1971, p. 9) recognized that androcentric common sense tended to re-assert itself quite quickly even after a

challenge to man-made culture has been made successfully. 'It is no easy matter to deny or reverse a universal assumption. The human mind has had a good many jolts since it began to think, but after each upheaval it settles down as peacefully as the vine-growers on Vesuvius, accepting the last lava crust as permanent ground.'

Bem emphasized similarities between these theorists, but contradictions in the definition of androcentrism are quickly evident. Most obviously, Gilman's use of Darwin led her to make assumptions about women's and men's natures, and particularly to emphasize the greater activity of men over women. As such, Gilman (1971 [1911]) could be read as engaging in precisely the kind of biological essentialism that Bem critiqued elsewhere (see also Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011). Similarly, Beauvoir emphasized freedom and agency as human characteristics that are not linked to either sex, but psychological research on construals of the self might suggest that Beauvoir was conflating men's distinct attributes with human attributes (Cross & Madson, 1997). Such difficulties with classic theories point to two general problems with any attempt to define androcentrism, which we explicate below.

First, claims of androcentric bias commit the critic to imagining a reality that is not distorted by androcentrism, and this seems to require the precise definition of those common human traits that women and men share, and those distinct traits on which they differ. But it is impossible to partial human traits into two and only two such categories in any absolute sense (Butler, 1990). Consider how Bem's attempt to define those traits can be readily troubled. Bem largely assumed that there are two (and only two) types of people who are defined by their physical 'sex', (c.f. Ungar, 1979), but that biology did not affect women and men 'beyond the obvious differences in their anatomy and physiology' (Bem, 1993, p. 37). However, the physical attributes that seem to ground the category of 'sex' are only apparently 'obvious' and have changed over historical time (Laqueur, 1992;

Meyerowitz, 2004). We write from the United Kingdom, a country where, in 2005, the Gender Recognition Act re-defined legal sex as something that is based on identity, verified by psychiatric opinion, rather than something that is defined by genital criteria. In the UK, we are categorized by others on the evidence of our genitals rarely in public interaction, but we are more often treated differently as women and men who are assumed to have body parts that are mapped to those social categories by cultural assumptions. The difference between anatomical genitals and such 'cultural genitals' matters (cf. Garfinkel, 1967) particularly to thousands of our fellow UK residents who have gender recognition certificates that legally define their sex differently from the one assigned at birth. By treating 'female' and 'male' as automatically synonymous with 'woman' and 'man', Bem's own definition of androcentrism arguably privileges the experiences of people whose own designations of their own genders and 'sex' categories have been legitimated by external authorities. That definition thereby 'others' those whose genders have not been so legitimated, contributing to a gendered lens that has recently been called *cisgenderism* (e.g., Ansara & Hegarty, 2012).

A second difficulty arises in critiquing androcentrism because humans categorize people and things as variably good exemplars of categories (Rosch & Mervis, 1975), and as definitely belonging to those categories or not. We can and do use different logics of categorization (Sloman, 1996). As a result, criticisms of androcentrism, such as Bem's, which are mounted on behalf of excluded women risk privileging the experience of some women who are taken to be 'good exemplars' of that category over other women (Yoder & Kahn, 1993). For example, psychology of women textbooks in the United States, aimed at increasing inclusion, sometimes speak more to the experiences of middle-class women in that country (Santos de Barona & Reid, 1992) than to the experiences of working-class women, or women outside the United States. In other words, criticisms



of androcentrism may simply shift the problem of taking some people as the norm down one level, rather than getting rid of the problem altogether. Psychology has, throughout its history, constructed a narrow empirical data base by over-sampling American college students, whilst making claims about universals that are not sustainable in light of evidence from cultural psychology (Arnett, 2008; Heinrich, Heine, and Noranzayan, 2010; Sue, 1999). Psychologists have much to learn from second-wave feminist interventions in androcentrism in tackling such problems of representation, and feminist psychology needs to question its own investment in such confections to develop more robust evidence theory and critique (Burman, 1998; Cole, 2009).

Indeed, 'gender' is not the same thing at different points in time and some scholars have challenged the concept of 'gender' itself as an ethnocentric construct that cannot be applied universally (e.g., Oyěwùmí, 1997). The dichotomy between 'sex' and 'gender' is a mid-20th century invention in English (Meyerowitz, 2004) that has no parallel in many human languages, and the cultural common sense that there are only two sexes, defined by obvious anatomical differences, is not a species-universal category system (Morris, 1995; Nanda, 1990). Some of these non-binary category systems are in decline because of the influence of external influence, such as the five gender categories among the Bugis people from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi (Davies, 2007). Similarly, the two-sex system anchored by assumptions about cultural genitals appears to have shifted in some places since Garfinkel (1967) described it (Speer, 2005; Tee & Hegarty, 2006). In sum, Gilman's analogy to the lava of Vesuvius remains apt. Both the assumption that there is a natural category of 'sex', and the ethnocentric focus of Bem's account of androcentrism in US culture appear to be the ground upon which analysis of androcentrism has stood. However, we argue that this ground is not as firm a basis for our footing as we sometimes think.

Bem's (1993) theory of androcentrism fitted the volcanic zeitgeist of her own time. Similar criticisms of androcentric viewpoints were being developed in sociology (Eichler, 1991; Reinharz, 1992), and philosophy (Flax, 1990; Harding, 1986). Harding described a compelling example of androcentrism in sociology: the division of time into public work and private leisure activities renders invisible the *unpaid* housework largely done by women. She cautioned against assuming such a division of labor to be a *natural* category that can be used to interpret evolutionary theories of human origins (see also Fedigan, 1986). In biology and medicine, feminists argued that the category of sex lacked ground (Fausto-Sterling, 1993) and critiqued medical interventions for managing children (Kessler, 1990) and adults (e.g., Stone, 1992) that did not fit emic constructions of sex in the United States. The androcentrism inherent in legal definitions of personhood came under attack (Pateman, 1988). Keller (1985) noted, early modern scientists' rhetoric about their own objectivity ironically relied rhetorically on sexist metaphors about heterosexual dominance. Feminists also increasingly understood women's interests as inseparable from intersecting identities such as race (Crenshaw, 1991) and sexuality (De Lauretis, 1991). Sociologists theorized masculinities by, de-coupling descriptions of men from descriptions of humanity (Kimmel, 1987). We next review fields where psychologists have developed analyses and interventions in response to androcentrism. We review the worlds of work, medicine and psychological science before considering, in greater detail, the relationship between being marked as 'other' and disadvantage. We conclude with lessons for the coming generation of intersectional criticisms of androcentrism in psychology.

## ANDROCENTRISM AT WORK

Common sociological and psychological theories of gender roles assert that the world

of paid work has been the basis of men's gender role in the West in recent centuries (e.g., Eagly, 1987; Parsons & Bales, 1956). During the 1970s, as second-wave feminism began to impact psychology, proportionately more women in North American and Western European countries engaged in paid work than did the generation of women before them. Many women perceived the real need for economic independence from men. An economic crisis in the early 1970s in these countries also led to stagnation of individual wages; family income could only increase if a family member other than the husband-breadwinner joined the workforce (Harvey, 1990).

Many women experienced workplaces as androcentric domains in which stereotyping, discrimination and unwanted sexual advances created differences that limited engagement. Workplace *leader* was quickly identified as an androcentric category defined around men (Schein, 1973). Tellingly, men who entered professions in which women had been the default norm sometimes experienced career advantage rather than disadvantage as a result of their gender distinctiveness (Williams, 1992). Psychological evidence about gender stereotyping was used successfully in a United States Supreme Court judgment to account for androcentrism inherent in valuing traits such as *aggressiveness* in leaders whilst devaluing women leaders for exhibiting it (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991).

US legal systems were used to undo androcentrism at work. The term 'sexual harassment' was introduced into English by US feminist authors to describe the experience of unwanted sexual advances by men toward women (see Maass, Cadinu, & Galdi, Chapter 21 this volume). Sexual harassment was defined as a form of sex discrimination in the United States by the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission in 1980 (Brownmiller, 1999). As a democracy formed along liberal principles, the United States has a history of legal androcentrism with its roots in the liberal ideas that men have political personhood and that women

engage in public life as wives, daughters, servants, and slaves of men (Pateman, 1988). US law commonly relies on the notion of what a 'reasonable man' might do, or understand, in a particular context. In 1991, the legislation of sexual harassment law made the androcentrism inherent in such law explicit. In *Ellison v. Brady*, the US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals challenged the 'reasonable man' standard by applying a 'reasonable woman' standard to define the range of workplace behaviors that could reasonably be said to constitute 'sexual harassment.' This range was presumed to be wider for women than for men (Gutek & O'Connor, 1995).

The reasonable woman standard exemplifies social change following the recognition of an androcentric system. This intervention has mattered; US federal district courts that have applied the reasonable woman standard have been somewhat more likely to find in favor of the plaintiff – usually a woman – in sexual harassment cases (Perry, Kulik, & Bourhis, 2004). This change in the law is supported by psychological evidence that men perceive fewer workplace interactions between women and men to be 'harassing' than do women. Gender differences are larger when the harassment involves a hostile work environment than a quid pro quo offer of advantage in return for sex. Men are also slower to perceive sexual harassment as having taken place when the man accused of harassment lacks workplace authority over the female plaintiff (Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001). However, the two problems of overgeneralizing from a limited sample of women and men, and of overconfidence in the definition of women's and men's distinct characteristics are also relevant to this case. Gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment appear to be larger in the United States than elsewhere (Pryor et al., 1997), and so extrapolation of sexual harassment law from the United States risks unintended ethnocentrism. Second, the reasonable woman standard is invested in an understanding of the paradigmatic harasser as a heterosexual man and of the paradigmatic victim as a woman.

However, these roles are not attached to these social categories in an absolute sense. The legal definition of sexual harassment within the United States now includes that which occurs between people of the same legal sex, as among straight men in the *Oncale v. Sundowner Offshore Services*, 1998 case, for example.

The analysis of androcentrism at work would differ if we began from a distinct geographical evidence base. Igboland is one of the most densely populated areas of the African continent, the continent that psychologists have studied less than any other (Arnett, 2008). Igbo peoples were a loosely integrated multilingual group, who lived as part of the Kingdom of Nri and the Kingdom of Benin from about 900 CE, and who were frequently captured as part of the transatlantic slave trade. Around the time of the American Civil War that ended slavery in the United States, Igbo people were subjected to British colonial rule. Nigeria became a British Protectorate in 1901, and Christian missionaries accompanied colonizers in converting many Igbo people away from traditional beliefs. Nigeria achieved independence in 1960. Igbo peoples were killed in great numbers during the Biafran war of 1967–1970 and subjected to devastating poverty in the decade that followed.

Just as the shift to ‘late capitalism’ of the 1970s and 1980s led women in the United States to increasing participation in paid work, historical changes in Igboland have dramatically shifted gender roles as they intersect with patterns of subsistence. In the pre-colonial period, women administered crops and property, an egalitarian ideology prevailed and women’s political power and self-rule in Igboland derived from village-wide gatherings, called *mikiri*. Women’s collective bargaining power through *mikiri* protected and enhanced women’s central role as traders, and were also used to address a range of other ‘gender’ issues including men’s misuse of crops grown by women and husbands’ abuse of their wives (Harris, 1940). Women’s strikes and protest songs were other effective political weapons

for collective action (Van Allen, 1997). However, the British colonial system supplanted this cultural division of labor and power with one that was both more individualized and more androcentric. The British administration appointed ‘warrant chiefs,’ men who were sole tax collectors for all Igbo property within villages (Van Allen, 1997). The Igbo Women’s War of 1929 was a collective protest led by rural women against this system, which led several warrant chiefs to resign and destroyed several rural courts. Abidogun’s (2007) later field research with predominantly Northern Igbo-speaking secondary students revealed a blended and sometimes contradictory gender ideology. Some 21st-century secondary school students in Igboland have received training in traditional farming skills, but they often lose those skills through schooling, due to time constraints and changing status expectations. Igbo history was not represented in the region’s Christian schools’ textbooks, and those schools’ ‘religious knowledge’ curriculum described women’s role as ‘helpmeets’ of men, quite in contrast to the agentic position ascribed to brides in traditional Igbo marriage ceremonies (Agbasiere, 2000).

We have drawn together the *reasonable woman* standard and the colonization and Christian conversion of Igbo people to show both how androcentric understandings of work, law and politics as men’s domains have *created* more androcentric cultures – as in Igboland – and how feminists have worked *within* those systems – as in both the United States and Igboland – to create cultural change. Societal sexism supports gender-based equality across a broad range of societies (Brandt, 2011), but more in-depth historical understanding is necessary not only to demonstrate how the phenomenon of androcentrism intersects with culture, history, and power (Cole, 2009), but also how to avoid sedimenting ‘simple stories’ following eruptions of social change of consciousness of difference (Adichie, 2009). Indeed, as Riley’s (2002) research has shown, androcentrism at work often relies on forgetting historical

inequalities that continue to create differences, as it did among the British men in her interview study who talked as if *all* workers enjoyed *their* gender privileges. Given the volcanic nature of social change, it is tempting to look at bodily differences as the stable crystallized ground for unbiased analysis. In the next section we trouble this conclusion.

## ANDROCENTRISM AND THE BODY OF MEDICAL EVIDENCE

In the introduction to this chapter we queried Bem's assumption about 'obvious differences in anatomy and physiology' and return to it here to introduce our discussion of androcentrism in medicine and biology. Far from being 'obvious differences', anatomic differences among genitals are routinely framed in androcentric ways in many places. Psychologists Kessler and McKenna (1978) concluded from their diverse categorization experiments that people categorized others on the basis of having a penis or not, regardless of whether they had a vagina. English-language dictionary definitions define the penis by its function and the vagina and clitoris by their location, as if written to accommodate the perspective of a person using one organ and searching for the other (Braun, 2001). Slang terms more often imply identification with the penis (through names such as Dick and Thomas) and the 'othering' of the vulva and vagina (through terms such as 'down there', see Braun & Kitzinger, 2001). Anatomy textbooks locate differences in 'female' genitals, describing the clitoris as a 'little penis,' but never describing the penis as a 'large clitoris' (Clarke, 2003). The discourse of doctors who surgically alter the genitals of intersex children similarly reveals assumptions about the primacy of the penis that cannot be accounted for by the anatomical features with which these doctors actually work (Morland, 2004). 'Sex' is not a cultural bedrock upon which 'gender' is built (Butler, 1993). Rather, the history and sociology of sex categorizations illustrates how humans can impose diverse biological category systems

to fit their culturally particular categories, with diverse consequences for the people categorized (see also Douglas, 1966).

Historically, 'Western' medicine represented men's bodies to socialize students into medicine (Petersen, 1998). Illustrations of women's bodies are used mainly to elucidate reproductive organs (see also Moore & Clarke, 1995). This androcentrism can work to women's disadvantage. In a famous early psychological study, Broverman, Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, and Vogel (1970) reported that the traits attributed to mentally healthy adults overlapped more with those attributed to mentally healthy men than mentally healthy women. This study contained a confound, however; the authors selected more traits that were known to be stereotypically descriptive of men than descriptive of women (Widiger & Settle, 1987). Nevertheless, the three-condition design provides a useful paradigm for psychologists to test experimentally when the characteristics of a group are conflated with men more than with women in that group. Eagly and Kite's (1987) study of national stereotypes provides another compelling example of the use of this design.

Paradoxically, such uses of the male-body-as-paradigm, have co-existed in 'Western' medicine with theories of radical differences. Menstrual distress constitutes an illustrative area where men's bodies are taken as a standard, and difference is located in women to women's disadvantage (Caplan, 2004; Nikelly, 1996). In the 19th century, allopathic 'Western' doctors increasingly interrogated bodies for evidence of difference that would justify the legal differences between the 'male' and 'female' sex (Laqueur, 1990). For example, in one case in the colonial United States an election hung on the medical definition of a person as a woman or a man to determine whether their vote was legitimate or not (Reis, 2009). Symptoms of menstrual distress were simultaneously used to essentialize women as irrational and as different from men within this system. 'Menstrual distress' was first noted in 1847 (Connolly, 2001) and 'premenstrual tension' (Frank,

1931) and ‘premenstrual syndrome’ followed (Greene & Dalton, 1953). ‘Late Luteal Phase Dysphoric Disorder (LLPDD)’ was an unspecified mental disorder listed for further study in DSM-III-R (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). DSM-IV-TR (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) included ‘Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder’, again listed for further study, and PMDD is expected to remain in the forthcoming DSM-V.

Feminist psychologists have often used empirical methods to counter these stereotypes (Hollingworth, 1914; Parlee, 1973; Sommer, 1973). The existence of the syndrome depends upon self-reported distress which has been shown to be somewhat affected by expectations (Klebanov & Jemmott, 1992; Ruble, 1977). Consistent with our earlier argument that no single biological criterion can unambiguously define a sex category, we point out that some men do experience menstrual pain (Baba et al., 2007). Androcentrism accounts only in part for these men’s exclusion from research on menstruation. Gallant, Popiel, Hoffman, Chakraborty, and Hamilton (1992) reported a smart study whose design drew attention to the difference between actual men’s experience of distress and the idealized non-menstruating body against which ‘menstrual distress’ is defined. These authors used DSM criteria for the diagnosis of the then-current LLPDD, and asked women who reported premenstrual problems, women who did not report problems, women who were taking oral contraceptives, and men to document symptoms of LLPDD experienced over a two-month period. Those women who reported premenstrual problems were more likely to report changes in symptoms between the premenstrual and follicular phases of their cycles than were the other groups of women. However, the differences were not absolute. Sixty-one percent of the women who reported premenstrual problems and 22% of the men in this study evidenced symptoms that matched a liberal criterion for the LLPDD diagnosis. Research such as this which redirects attention to variability among a social

group assumed that to embody an ideal norm is a useful way for psychologists to evidence the existence of ideological distortion. Hooker’s (1957) classic demonstration that the Rorschach responses of straight men were similar to those of gay men provides another example of this logic in action.

The practice of conducting clinical trials in the United States experienced a revolution away from androcentric thinking in the early 1990s. The 1993 National Institute of Health Revitalization Act (US) mandated the inclusion of women and ethnic minority participants in such trials which had previously tended to include only white men. As Epstein’s (2007) analysis shows, the 1993 Act changed the landscape without leveling the playing field. Since 1993, researchers have over-recruited ‘normative’ women and ‘normative’ people of ethnic minority background who are easiest to recruit; medical research has recognized the skill of recruiting minority participants, and some medical activists who represent social groups not mentioned in the 1993 Act – such as lesbians and gay men – experience the pressure to essentialize those groups as ethnic-like to access inclusive policies (Epstein, 2007). As with the ‘reasonable woman’ standard, such policy shifts within a system of thought based on representation are important, but do not bring about social ideals. Contemporary shifts in psychological science are similar.

### **SEXIST LANGUAGE AND ANDROCENTRISM IN PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE**

In recent decades, norms for representing women and men in psychological science have changed. The most concrete example of reform of androcentric practice concerns the use of masculine generics such as ‘he’ and ‘man’ in scientific writing. Masculine generics are an interesting case where psychologists both took the phenomenon of language use as an institutional problem to resolve and



as a form of human behavior to research. Proscribed in legal discourse by an androcentric Act of the British Parliament in 1850 (Bodine, 1975), these generics have never entirely replaced the use of the less gendered term 'they' to refer to people of unknown gender in English (Baranowski, 2002). Academic norms to use masculine generics that were established in earlier decades were both critiqued on grounds that they were androcentric and defended on grounds of 'tradition' and aesthetics (see Martyna, 1980; Harding, 1986 for discussion). An APA policy defined such generics as sexist language in 1977 (APA Publication Manual Task Force, 1977) and most psychologists changed their language in the years that followed (Gannon, Luchetta, Rhodes, Pardie, & Segrist, 1992). Original psychological research showed that such masculine generics lead people to call to mind imagery of men rather than women (Gastil, 1990; Moulton, Robinson & Elias, 1978), to judge occupations as more suited to men than to women (Bem & Bem, 1973; Hyde, 1984), and to make women feel ostracized (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). Correlations have been observed between sexist attitudes and both the use of and tolerance for masculine generics among English-speaking students in the United States (Parks & Robertson, 2004). Research documents that men use sexist language less often if their sexism has been challenged (Mallett & Wagner, 2011). As with other reforms of androcentrism, explicit direction to use inclusive language has only limited effects on sexism at the individual level. Prentice (1994) found that learning to undo the habit of using sexist language does not in itself undo other forms of sexist thinking.

Within psychological science, changes in the use of *linguistic* forms, such as masculine generics, appear not to have addressed *conceptual* androcentrism and its effects on thinking about differences between women and men. Bernard (1973, p. 787) suggested that such defaults may strongly affect scientific thinking about group differences. 'A great deal of research focuses on men with no

reference at all to women; but when research is focused on women, it is always with reference to men. If comparisons are not made with men, the research is viewed as incomplete' (see also Parlee, 1981). Particular areas of research have been criticized on similar grounds. For example, explanations of gender differences in suicide rates overlook the particular value that men in some cultures place on independence and decisiveness (Hampton & Frombach, 2000). Among the populations best studied by psychologists to date, many social categories have presumed default genders (Oakhill, Garnham, & Reynolds, 2005) and even default 'race' identities (Pratto, Korchmaros, & Hegarty, 2007; Zárate & Smith, 1990). Some categories – such as *surgeon* – have such strong default values that vexing riddles can be constructed that exploit androcentric thinking (Reynolds, Garnham, & Oakhill, 2006).

Consistent with Bem's (1993) definition, such default identities may also lead to the habit of taking men as the norm and the attribution of differences to women. Indeed, when a category has a default social identity (such as being a man), explanations of group differences within that category often focus on the attributes of the non-default social group (such as women). Thus, the default assumption of students in the United States is often that 'voters' and 'professors' are men, and their explanations of gender differences in these categories refer to attributes of women more than attributes of men. However, women are not the focus when gender differences among school teachers are explained (Miller, Taylor, & Buck, 1991). Two findings suggest that similar concepts have affected psychologists' published accounts of gender research. First, Ader and Johnson (1994) observed that psychological research articles published in the early 1990s more often discussed the limited generalizability of findings about women than of findings about men. Second, research articles published in psychology between 1965 and 2004 show a persistent tendency to explain gender difference by focusing on

girls and women more than on boys and men (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006).

Habits of explaining group differences by referring to the attributes of the lower status group have been observed in domains beyond gender (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001; Pratto et al., 2007). Further consistent with Bem's (1993) definition, such asymmetries may also work to women's systematic disadvantage. When presented with empirical differences between unfamiliar groups, German students inferred that the group who were explained-as-different had less power and agency and more communal traits than the group linguistically positioned as the norm for comparison (Bruckmüller & Abele, 2010). Framing gender differences differently can shift thinking. When the identical gender differences in leadership are presented in terms of how men differ from women rather than as how women differ from men, then men's greater power in the domain of leadership is perceived to be smaller and less legitimate (Bruckmüller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012).

Metaphor is a second domain where implicit conceptualizations may work to women's disadvantage in science. Consistent with Butler's (1990) argument that the interpretation of bodily difference is always gendered, gametes have been narrated in biology textbooks as romantically involved human women and men (Martin, 1991), and undergraduates misremember tests about egg-and-sperm stories to endow greater agency to sperm cells than to egg cells (Bangerter, 2000). In evolutionary psychology, human forms of sociality are often used to metaphorically scaffold understandings of unfamiliar animal societies, as Pratto (1999) reflexively observed about her own writing about *inheritance* in evolution. Metaphorical understanding requires the construction of new meanings that match features of *targets* (genetic transmission) and sources (the inheritance of human property; Glucksberg & Keysar, 1990). Feminist biologists have suggested that many evolutionary psychologists' use of metaphors drawn from human societies, such as 'harem', 'rape', and 'courtship',

may scaffold readers' understandings of animal behavior making those human arrangements appear to be grounded in 'nature' to a greater extent than is justified (Keller, 1985). Similar concerns have been raised about accounts of early hominids 'division of labor' between 'hunting' and 'gathering' (Fedigan, 1986). Psychological research showing that people often fail to keep track of which meanings are literal and which are metaphorical add strength to these arguments (Perrott, Gentner, & Bodenhausen, 2005; see also Bruckmüller, Ryan, Haslam, & Peters, Chapter 27 this volume).

Finally, psychologists continue to discover new ways that language subtly affects understanding, such as the way that gender stereotypes lead to a preference to name men before women in English (Hegarty, Watson, Fletcher, & McQueen, 2011). Modern psychological research on generics originated in English, an unlikely starting point because English is an unusual human language that marks gender only in first person pronouns (and not in plural pronouns, verbs, or adjectives). German nouns have masculine generics and inclusive forms which prompt different imagery (Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen, & Sczesny, 2007). The use of masculine generic nouns in French and German can override the effects of feminine *stereotypical* generics which are strong in English (Gygax, Gabriel, Sarasin, Oakhill, & Garnham, 2008). More traditional noun forms in Italian that refer to women connote women's lower status in ways that less traditional forms of those nouns do not (Merkel, Maass, & Frommelt, 2012). Whilst the rhetoric of 'political correctness' often targeted sexist language research (Fairclough, 2003), there are sound empirical reasons to study, critique, and change the ways that language implicitly shapes thought about social groups (Ng, 2007).

## IS ABNORMALITY ALWAYS A DISADVANTAGE?

In this section, we examine another way that androcentrism theories can overstate their



capacity to level the playing field for all. Bem (1993) described androcentrism as resulting in reality becoming defined in terms of similarity or difference from men, and in terms of its *functional* significance for men. However, men's power can function by making men, rather than women, the focal gender. Indeed, when threatened with a lack of distinct boundaries, highly identified members of higher status groups sometimes react by asserting their distinctiveness (Jetten, Postmes, & Spears, 2004). Men are not simply disadvantaged when they pursue careers in which women are the default gender. Rather, men often experience 'glass elevator' routes to speedy promotion (Williams, 1992). Tackling androcentrism requires attention to those critical points where distinct attributes are attributed to men in ways that function to defend some men's structural authority and influence.

One way that men's authority can be served through distinctiveness is by conflating men with highly valued attributes. Androcentric accounts of high intelligence in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) cultures occur in romanticism (Battersby, 1989), eugenics (Galton, 1869), and psychiatric theories about 'mad geniuses' (Becker, 1978). Female authors remain systematically disadvantaged in science by 'Mathilda effects'; achievement leads to career advantage for women less reliably than it does for men (Rossiter, 1993). Psychologists who are assumed to be women based on their names or writing style may experience harsher evaluations in the peer review process (Petty, Fleming, & Fabrigar, 1999). The merit of their work can also be underestimated by journal impact factors (Hegarty & Walton, 2012).

Areas of science where women are the default constitute a particular intersection of default assumptions. Research articles in sociology appear to be more often first-authored by men, but articles framed as being about gender are more often first-authored by women (Grant & Ward, 1991). Gender has been described as the default territory of women researchers in the social sciences (Ferree,

Kahn, & Morimoto, 2007), and we recently found evidence suggesting that female researchers may be the default norm for psychology studies of women, but that male researchers may remain privileged when they study women (Quick & Hegarty, 2011). Students in Britain explained why a psychologist – who was either a woman or a man – might have conducted a psychological study including participants who were either women or men. When studies with female participants were described, their gender was commented upon when the psychologist was a man, but the gender of the *psychologist* was more often flagged when the author was a woman. In a second study, participants were more *surprised* that research in the psychology of gender had been conducted by a man, but considered the research of the woman psychologist to be more 'gender-biased'. These studies suggest that women are the presumed-default in this area of research (Ferree et al., 2007), but that surprisingly, men who author publications in this area are also seen as *less* biased than women. Distinctiveness appears to work to men's advantage, as in other fields where women professionals are the statistical majority (Williams, 1992).

How might androcentrism function when a category is both devalued and defined around men and men's experiences? Lombroso (2006 [1876]) aimed to isolate physical hallmarks of criminality and drew on observations of men. He concluded from later studies of women that women committed less crime because they were lower on the evolutionary scale (Lombroso & Ferrero, 1958 [1895]). Most recorded crimes are committed by men (Home Office, 1995, 2003), and the link between criminality and men is often undertheorized (Burns, 1992). Wilczynski (1997) argued that women who commit crime are positioned as 'double deviants' by virtue of the idea that criminality is viewed as 'unnatural' for women. In other words, androcentrism may work by defining devalued behavior associated with men as 'natural.' Consistent with this normalization of men, crime committed by women is

often explained as the expression of a presumed underlying pathology (Heidensohn, 1995; Ussher, 1991; Worrall, 1990) and female offenders who do not fit the norms of femininity receive more harsh treatment (Heidensohn, 1995). The status of 'natural' does not adhere to all identities overrepresented in crime statistics, and as a result men enjoy this normative status to different degrees. African-American men are disproportionately incarcerated in the United States and this disparity is frequently explained by psychologists by appealing to deficit models of African-American *culture* (Carter & Forsyth, 2007).

Finally, explanations of women who commit crime can work to exonerate an individual woman by reinforcing androcentric ideas about women as a group being 'other' to humanity. From the middle of the 19th century at least until the 1980s, women in Britain have received reduced charges for crimes on the grounds of diminished responsibility due to the psychological effects of menstruation (Eastal, 1991). Similarly, lesbianism became associated with criminality in the United States in the early 20th century through exonerations of individual lesbian women that drew upon pathologizing discourses of lesbianism (Duggan, 1993). Thus we conclude that androcentrism theories have often failed to adequately tease apart how power functions differently at the individual and group level, and how interests at these two levels are not always aligned.

## CONCLUSION

In response to the recognition of under- and over-inclusion of different peoples in psychology, as well as calls to examine how androcentrism intersects with national, class, and ethnic identity (e.g., Cole, 2009), we conclude that intervening in the ways that people are assumed to exist (or not) and are explicitly represented as *particular* or *general* is important 'hierarchy-attenuating' work (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). However, on its own, challenges – even successful

challenges – to such representational practices do not bring about social equality for all. We urge psychologists to continue to notice, critique, and undo androcentrism, whilst resisting the perils of overconfidence, essentialism, and complacency that can follow from success in their efforts. We hope to have provided feminists and other social justice researchers with some examples above that allow a measured evaluation of what can and cannot be expected from such reform efforts. In making such measured judgments, it is useful to remember Butler's (1993) argument that all categories of sex are 'performative'. All such categories constitute particular understandings of the exclusion of others, whether those categories are intended to be dominant or critical, traditional or revolutionary (see also Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Hence we conclude not with a new, improved definition that could supercede Bem's (1993), but a reminder of Gilman's metaphor about the vine-growers around Vesuvius. Androcentrism – like like volcanic lava – is dangerous stuff. It can sometimes unexpectedly become violent, and it can re-map the surrounding territory quickly and unexpectedly. Androcentrism can devastate. When it crystalizes, it can quickly come to appear as the stable ground upon which we have always stood, as when late-20th-century defenders of the masculine generics policies of the 19th century claimed such language was 'traditional', forgetting historical evidence to the contrary (Bodine, 1975). If there is a trick to understanding enduring and inverting androcentrism, then it is in learning to live with both the liquid and the solid natures of its volatile life.

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# Neurosexism in Functional Neuroimaging: From Scanner to Pseudo-science to Psyche

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## INTRODUCTION

The neuroscientific investigation of sex/gender<sup>1</sup> differences has an unsavoury history. In the Victorian era, for example, brain scientists reported sex/gender differences in head shape, brain size, and lobe morphology, claiming them as the neural basis for female intellectual inferiority (e.g., Russett, 1989; Shields, 1975). Such scientific hypotheses were eventually rejected. However, while favored by scientific and mainstream opinion, such claims were, Russett (1989, p. 191) has argued, a ‘key source’ of opposition to greater sex equality, serving to help legitimize a status quo in which women were denied equal access to political participation, higher education, and employment opportunities. To be clear, although such proposals have been erroneous in the past this is not to imply that there is something intrinsically problematic about neuroscientific research of this kind. Indeed, it is the task of science to develop, test, and – usually – reject hypotheses. In addition, not only are there average male/female

differences in behavior and incidence of some mental disorders (which suggests the presence of average brain differences, whatever their cause), but even in the case of behavioral similarity it is possible that the sexes reach the same behavioral ends via different neural means (De Vries, 2004; Hoffman, 2011; Moore, 1995). It has therefore been argued that failure to investigate the influence of sex on brain structure and function could potentially retard scientific progress in understanding both healthy and pathological behavior (Cahill, 2010; McCarthy & Arnold, 2011).

Nonetheless, it is the converse danger for this area of research, ‘neurosexism’ (a term coined in Fine, 2008), that is the subject of this chapter. Neurosexism refers to neuroscientific claims that reinforce and legitimate traditional gender stereotypes and roles in ways that are not scientifically justified. Moreover, implicit assumptions embedded in the research process may hinder the very scientific progress that is hoped for in understanding male/female differences (Bluhm, 2012; Fine, 2013;



Jordan-Young & Rumiati, 2012). The study and supposed psychological implications of structural sex/gender differences in the brain have a long history, and have been subjected to important and insightful feminist critiques that remain relevant today (e.g., Bleier, 1984; Fausto-Sterling, 1992; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Rogers, 1999). This chapter extends such critiques to focus on the use of fMRI, the relatively recent functional neuroimaging technology that enables researchers to (indirectly) identify the patterns of neural activity associated with the performance of a particular behavior and potentially reveal sex/gender differences in brain activation.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), now a commonly used technology for cognitive neuroimaging, exploits the different magnetic qualities of oxygenated versus deoxygenated blood to provide a proxy for neural activity, based on the principle that the blood oxygen level depends on neural activity (for accessible summaries, see Lehrer, 2008; Weisberg, 2008). Researchers seek to identify the neural correlates of the psychological construct of interest, most commonly by comparing brain activity (or, more accurately, blood oxygenation) while the psychological process of interest is taking place, compared with when it is not (or is present to a lesser extent). This is known as the ‘subtraction method’, as its logic is to ‘subtract’ activity in the control condition from activity in the experimental condition (for discussions of whether the assumptions behind the subtraction method are valid, see Roskies, 2010; Van Orden & Paap, 1997). For the purposes of analysis, the brain is divided into tens of thousands of tiny regions (called voxels), and tested for blood flow changes as a function of the psychological manipulation of interest. Brain regions that show changed activity become candidates for involvement in the psychological manipulation of interest. For example, a study of emotion processing might compare brain activity when participants are reading emotional words with a control condition in which participants read neutral words, as a way of identifying the regions of

neural activity correlated with the processing of emotional content, over and above neural activity associated with reading *per se*.

As a further step in analysis, neuroscientists can investigate whether the brain activation changes associated with the psychological construct of interest differ between groups, such as between females and males. Such studies look for ‘a difference in a difference’ (Bluhm, 2013, p. 321). For example, researchers might identify regions showing increased or decreased activity while viewing emotional images compared with neutral images, and then explore whether those regions differ between the sexes. Sometimes such comparisons are made on the basis of within-group analyses. That is, researchers run their analyses separately for both sexes, and report which regions were activated significantly more (or less) by the experimental condition in one sex but not the other. However, while such within-group comparisons are surprisingly common in neuroscience (Nieuwenhuis, Forstmann, & Wagenmakers, 2011), they do not necessarily indicate significant between-group differences. For example, as discussed by Bluhm (2013), Shirao and colleagues found significantly increased left medial frontal gyrus activity in men, but not women, in response to emotion-inducing pictures compared with the control condition (Shirao, Okamoto, Mantani, Okamoto, & Yamawaki, 2005). However, between-group comparisons of males and females found no significant difference between the two groups in this region.

fMRI may seem like a straightforwardly powerful and desirable tool to identify male/female differences in the brain, and thus provide insights into psychological differences. Yet for a number of reasons its use to achieve these ends is more complex and difficult than it might at first seem (see Fine, 2013). One major complexity for researchers to navigate arises from the fact that gender as a social phenomenon must be presumed to have material effects on the brain (e.g., Fausto-Sterling, 2000), both chronically and in the short term. As a consequence, any observed differences in neural activity between female and male

groups cannot be assumed to have been ‘caused’ by biological sex (see Brannon, 2008, Chapter 2, for a clear exposition of this point), but should instead be assumed to reflect a complex ‘socio-biological intertwinement’ (Kaiser et al., 2009, p. 50). Second, at this stage in our neuroscientific knowledge it is neither logically nor empirically valid to infer mental states from patterns of neural activity (e.g., Poldrack, 2006). This means that the psychological significance, if any, of reported group differences in neural activity is obscure. A final major issue discussed in this chapter is that a discipline-wide publication bias towards positive findings (Fanelli, 2012; Ioannidis, 2005; Yong, 2012) is exacerbated in sex/gender research to the extent that the sexes are routinely compared. Together, these practices result in the proliferation of false-positive findings of sex/gender differences (Kaiser et al., 2009; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). This chapter expands on these issues which, if overlooked, can shape the literature in a way that exaggerates the fixedness, functional significance, and extent of male/female brain differences (Fine, 2013). Additionally, the chapter provides examples of, and evidence for, the inadequate treatment of these issues in the literature as a whole. This, it is argued, facilitates more blatant popular forms of neurosexism that, in turn, can bring about self-fulfilling psychological effects. The chapter concludes with suggestions of issues for consideration in discussions of how to bring about improvement in this politically significant area of research.

## THE PLASTICITY OF BRAINS AND GENDERED MINDS

As a context for considering common practices in fMRI investigations of sex/gender it is helpful to outline the ‘brain organization’ hypothesis (for a recent overview, see Hines, 2010). This hypothesis proposes that fetal testosterone (which on average is higher in males between the eighth and twenty-fourth weeks of pregnancy) exerts permanent influences on

the brain and thus sex/gender-typed behavior. The brain organization hypothesis, at least as applied to humans, certainly includes a role for gender socialization in sex/gender-typed behavior. Nonetheless, females, on average, are proposed to be born biologically predisposed to be more interested in social stimuli, thus furnishing them with an advantage in social interactions such as empathizing, while males, on average, are proposed to be biologically predisposed to be more interested in stimuli relating to the operation of the physical world, such as object motion or understanding how systems work (e.g., Baron-Cohen, 2003; Berenbaum & Resnick, 2007; Hines, 2010). The brain organization hypothesis therefore has significant social implications. The notion of ‘original’ and permanent sex differences in the brain, motivating females to engage with the social world and males with the physical or abstract, implies that, at the very least, the ‘seeds’ of sex inequality are sown *in utero*, before being reinforced and exaggerated by processes of gender socialization. The brain organization hypothesis is a prominent account of sex-differentiated brain development and behavior in both scientific and popular literatures, but it has also been substantively criticized. This is in part on the basis of important empirical inconsistencies and contradictions in the data cited in support of the hypothesis, and especially on the grounds of data challenging the supposed permanency of ‘organizational’ fetal effects on brain and behavior (for recent critiques and data, see Fine, 2010; Grossi & Fine, 2012; Jordan-Young, 2010, 2012; Jordan-Young & Rumiati, 2012). The growing evidence for neuronal plasticity throughout development is in accord with such critiques. Neuronal plasticity refers to phenomena whereby neuronal characteristics are responsive to external, including social, experiences, resulting in changes such as in neuronal responsiveness, synaptic connectivity, dendritic branching, gene-expression, and gray and white matter volumes (e.g., Edelman & Auger, 2011; Fields, 2010; Haier et al., 1992; Jäncke, Gaab, Wüstenberg,

Scheich, & Heinze, 2001; Maguire et al., 2000). For example, Draganski and colleagues found that transient learning-induced gray matter changes were observed in participants who were given training in juggling. The observed increases in the mid-temporal area and left posterior intraparietal sulcus corresponded with juggling performance, and disappeared when participants lost their juggling skills through lack of practice (Draganski et al., 2004).

Thus, while no doubt the brain is not infinitely malleable, neural circuitry develops through, and is altered by, experience. The importance of this with respect to sex/gender in the brain comes from the fact that gender, as a powerful and pervasive social phenomenon, ensures that a person's biological sex will influence the experiences (such as material, social, and mental) she or he encounters. This will, in turn, leave neurological traces (see, for example, Fausto-Sterling, 2000, 2005; Kaiser, 2012 for arguments for the inextricable intertwining of sex and gender in the body and brain). Thus, whatever the sex-differentiated effects of prenatal hormones on brain development, or moderation by biological sex of experiential influences on the brain (Joel, 2011), the potential for gendered experiences to modify brain development through the phenomenon of neuronal plasticity means that it cannot be assumed that any observed differences in neural activity (or structure) between male and female groups were 'caused' by biological sex (rather than by any of a host of factors that might systematically vary by biological sex), or that those differences are permanent.

These points are further emphasized by the fact that sex/gender differences in behavior are not fixed but can vary across historical period, culture, socioeconomic group, ethnicity, and even in response to subtle social cues. To take the example of mathematics, in the United States the male/female gap in mean mathematical school performance has reduced and closed over the past few decades, while the disparity at very high levels of mathematical performance has been found to vary across

time and place as well as across ethnicities within North America (Hyde, Lindberg, Linn, Ellis, & Williams, 2008; Hyde & Mertz, 2009; Kane & Mertz, 2011). In addition, social psychological research indicates that mathematical performance can vary within the same individual across different social contexts. For example, investigations of the 'stereotype threat' phenomenon find that female mathematical performance is improved when, for instance, tests are presented in a way that de-emphasizes or makes irrelevant the stereotype that females are poor at mathematics (Nguyen & Ryan, 2008; Walton & Spencer, 2009). (However, for a more skeptical conclusion regarding the effect of stereotype threat on female mathematical performance, see Stoet & Geary, 2012). This is just one example of the general phenomenon that social context affects gendered behavior in myriad ways (for numerous other examples, see Fine, 2010).

This plasticity in gendered behavior must be accompanied by changeability at the neuronal level. For example, if mean female mathematical performance has improved over time, this must somehow be reflected in a change at the neuronal level, which will affect the degree of male/female brain difference. Likewise, if reducing stereotype threat improves female performance, the presence or absence of stereotype threat in the testing situation must affect the pattern of female brain activity. Indeed, this was suggested in studies which found that exposure to negative (versus neutral or positive) stereotypes about female capacity on male-typical tasks (mathematics and visual-spatial) was associated with reduced performance and different patterns of brain activity (Krendl, Richeson, Kelley, & Heatherton, 2008; Wraga, Helt, Jacobs, & Sullivan, 2006).

The plasticity of brains and gendered behavior means that simply finding a male/female difference in brain activity does not, on its own, allow the conclusion that the difference is 'hardwired' (see Hoffman, 2011, for extensive discussion of this point). But in addition, such a finding also leaves unexplained the

processes whereby the sex/gender difference in brain (and behavior) arose (Jordan-Young & Rumiati, 2012; Schmitz, 2010), and offers no insights into the factors influencing when the difference might be decreased, increased, eliminated, or even reversed (a point made by Shields, 2000 in relation to sex/gender difference research in emotion). Such insights are only possible through studies that investigate the integral role of experiential factors that are patterned by gender (such as social context, training, education, or prior experience) on neurobiology and behavior. Yet as Eliot (2011b) has observed, remarkably few neuroimaging studies explore how gendered experience becomes incorporated into the brain. Indeed, a recent survey of all fMRI studies published in 2009 and 2010 that investigated sex/gender differences as a primary focus found that none departed from what has been described as a ‘catalogue of differences’ approach (Springer, Stellman, & Jordan-Young, 2012) of comparing groups divided on the basis of biological sex (Fine, 2013).

This predominantly ‘catalogue of differences’ approach has two important consequences for research. One is that it ‘[distracts] from the kind of focused research into specific mechanisms that we need, by offering the rather empty answer of “sex” to all questions we pose about the cause of male-female disparities’, as has been argued in relation to health research (Springer et al., 2012, p. 1823). A second consequence is that even though researchers themselves, of course, understand that ‘in the brain’ does not mean ‘hardwired’, such an approach guarantees that no data will be found that challenge the notion of ‘hardwired’ male/female neural signatures.

It might be assumed that a finding of male/female difference in brain activity, even if it can’t contribute to understanding of underlying causes, processes, or scope for plasticity can nonetheless offer a useful insight of another kind – namely, into psychological differences between the sexes. This hope, however, brings us to a second major difficulty for researchers working in this area – that of inferring mental states from neural states.

## WHAT DO SEX/GENDER DIFFERENCES IN BRAIN ACTIVITY MEAN?

The general aim of cognitive neuroimaging studies is to identify regions of brain activity (using, for example, the subtraction method described earlier) that correlate with psychological constructs. These regions then become candidates for involvement in the mental process of interest, although the correlational nature of the data does not establish such involvement beyond doubt (Henson, 2005). Researchers may also wish to, and often do, infer a mental state from regions of brain activity, a process known as ‘reverse inference’ (Poldrack, 2006, 2008; Poldrack & Wagner, 2004). Thus, for example, on the basis that a study that induced fear found increased amygdala activity, the presence of increased amygdala activity in a subsequent study might be taken to suggest that participants were feeling fearful.

However, brain function involves the complex and dynamic interaction of multiple brain regions and, conversely, any particular population of neurons is likely to be recruited by multiple behaviors (see Friston & Price, 2001). Individual brain regions can be, and are, activated by any number of psychological processes. The amygdala, for example, has been linked with numerous mental states, including anxiety, arousal, and positive mental states. Thus, no neat one-to-one mappings can be made between activity in a particular brain region and a particular mental state. This means that ‘reverse inferences’ (i.e., claims that increased activity in a particular region of the brain implies the presence of a particular mental process) are not logically valid (Poldrack, 2006). At best, the presence of increased activity in a particular region increases the probability that a particular psychological process is taking place. Moreover, greater activity in a particular brain region does not necessarily imply psychologically ‘more’ or ‘better’, since brain activity in a neural circuit may become more streamlined with experience or as a consequence of performance improvement (e.g., Blakemore, den

Ouden, Choudhury, & Frith, 2007; Burnett, Bird, Moll, Frith, & Blakemore, 2009; Petersson, Elfgrén, & Ingvar, 1997). Differences in brain activity may also be statistically significant but have no functional significance for behavior. There is also potential for ‘multiple realization’ of mental states in the brain; that is, a particular mental state may, in different individuals or groups, be constituted differently in the brain (see Hoffman, 2011). Thus, for several reasons, significant sex/gender differences in activity in a particular brain region do not provide a valid basis for inferences of either quantitative or qualitative sex/gender differences in a particular psychological process.

What, then, can be made of such findings? There is a case to be made that it is scientifically legitimate to speculate on the functional implications of sex/gender differences in brain activity. However, the danger is that gender stereotypes will be readily drawn upon to interpret these highly ambiguous data. For example, it has been noted (Fine, 2010) that the absence of empirical or theoretical grounding for speculations about brain–mind relations in visual–spatial processing means that precisely opposite hypotheses can be equally plausible. It has long been proposed that the greater lateralization of the male brain (i.e., a tendency to use a particular brain region unilaterally rather than bilaterally) furnished men with an advantage in visual–spatial processing (see McGlone, 1980). However, this hypothesis was based not on a well-developed and empirically supported understanding of the neural basis of visual–spatial processing. Rather, it was based on the reasoning that since males are superior in visual–spatial processing, (supposedly) male brain characteristics must be advantageous for visual–spatial processing – and this explains male superiority (Bleier, 1986). As a consequence, when contradictory data come in, researchers are able to suggest post-hoc revisions of the hypothesis – such as that bilateral processing is superior (Halari et al., 2006), or unilateral processing in some regions but bilateral processing in others is

superior (Gur et al., 2000) – without relinquishing the underlying assumption that male and female brains differ in a way that lends an advantage to males.

Similarly, Bluhm (2013, p. 321) has noted that neuroscientific investigations of sex differences in emotion processing ‘are simultaneously trying to find sex/gender differences and to identify the characteristic activity associated with emotion processing in general. This makes it hard for researchers to interpret the meaning of between-group differences, since a well-developed understanding of the relevant neurobiology is still lacking.’ Bluhm has noted that a consequence of this lack of neurocognitive models in emotion research is that it is often unclear (apparently sometimes even in the minds of the researchers) whether men and women are thought to deploy different strategies and therefore neural networks, or to instead deploy the same neural networks but to different extents. For example, in studies of emotion processing researchers may sometimes interpret sex/gender differences in brain activity as reflecting a quantitative difference in male/female responsiveness to the emotional stimuli, such as reflecting ‘a higher attention, cognitive modulation or greater affective reactivity to the stimulus material in females’ (Derntl et al., 2010, p. 78), or as reflecting qualitative differences such as that a ‘pattern of findings is consistent with the higher emotional reactivity and emotion-focused coping style commonly observed among females ... [while observed male neural activity] is probably related to the cognitive effort and specific regulatory strategies that they had employed.’ (Mak, Hu, Zhang, Xiao, & Lee, 2009, p. 2907). Bluhm (2012) has documented the danger of speculations made in such theoretical and empirical vacuums, pointing to how three neuroimaging studies of sex/gender differences in the cognitive control of emotions – one showing greater male activation of the prefrontal cortex (Shirao, Okamoto, Mantani, Okamoto, & Yamawaki, 2005), the second study showing less male activation (McRae, Ochsner,



Mauss, Gabrieli, & Gross, 2008), and the third showing similar levels of activation (Koch et al., 2007) – all proposed that observed sex/gender differences in brain activity indicated superior male cognitive control over emotions. As Bluhm (2012, p. 12) notes, researchers are drawing on the long-standing stereotype that women are more emotional than men because they are less capable of exerting reason to control their affective states (Shields, 1975), and use this ‘framework [to] conclude that their study shows that women exert less cognitive control over their emotions, no matter what imaging results they find.’

As these examples illustrate, the absence of well-developed and empirically supported accounts of the relationship between brain activity and mental processes readily enables interpretations of findings that draw on gender stereotypes to fill in (or exploit) the substantial gaps in neuroscientific knowledge. As Fausto-Sterling (2000, p. 118) described this phenomenon, ‘despite the many recent insights of brain research, this organ remains a vast unknown, a perfect medium on which to project, even unwittingly, assumptions about gender.’ This is not to say that it is never useful to speculate that a particular mental process is taking place on the basis of observed patterns of brain activity. Poldrack (2008) has argued that such reverse inferences are a useful research tool when used to generate hypotheses to put to test in further work. Such an approach, as part of a strategy of systematic development and testing of predictions derived from well-specified neurocognitive accounts of the sex/gender-modulated mental processes involved in the behavior of interest, would reduce the scope for stereotype-infused speculations. Yet the previously mentioned analysis of 2009/2010 fMRI studies of sex/gender differences found that none tested model-driven predictions in this way (Fine, 2013). Nonetheless, speculative reverse inferences were common, occurring in 27 of the 39 studies (69 per cent), and the influence of gender stereotypes was especially clear where speculations were consistent with stereotypes

but inconsistent with the researchers’ own relevant behavioral data, where it was available. This was the case for 11 of 14 studies. For example, on the basis of marginally greater amygdala activity in (six) women in the follicular phase of the menstrual cycle, Derntl et al. (2010, p. 78) suggested that ‘the follicular phase facilitates sensitivity and behavior in socio-emotional situations’. However, contra this suggestion, no differences in empathizing ability were observed between women in different phases of their cycle. Similarly, a second study investigated the effect of menstrual cycle phase on brain responses to aversive stimuli (Goldstein, Jerram, Abbas, Whitfield-Gabrieli, & Makris, 2010). The authors reported greater attenuation of brain activity in subcortical regions, including the amygdala, in 12 women when in the late follicular/mid-cycle phase, compared with the early follicular phase. From this finding they suggested that hormonal changes in women may reduce the stress response. However, this interpretation was contradicted by the absence of reduced anxiety and other negative emotions in this group, either before or after viewing 72 highly arousing aversive pictures. These two speculations are of particular note given the long history of sexism surrounding the supposed psychological effects of women’s hormones (Fausto-Sterling, 1992).

Another salient feature of these two studies are the modest sample sizes involved, and this is a common research feature that contributes to the third major issue in this area of research to be discussed in this chapter – that of false-positive results.

## FALSE-POSITIVE RESULTS

Publication bias towards positive findings is a long-noted problem within sex/gender research (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). When a single experiment establishes a ‘significant difference’ between the sexes, this difference does not necessarily reflect a real (i.e., replicable) result. Since by convention one in 20 ‘significant’ results occur by chance, if



20 researchers routinely test for sex/gender differences then, even if there is no real difference between the populations, one researcher will find a statistically significant difference. The concern, given that the publication process is geared toward emphasizing difference rather than similarity, is that this one in 20 finding of difference will be reported while the 19 failures to find a difference will not. While false-positive results and publication bias are issues in all areas of behavioral science (for recent discussions, see Fanelli, 2012; Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011; Yong, 2012), they are exacerbated in the sex/gender differences field to the extent that male/female comparisons are routinely made. There is no way of knowing whether researchers who do not report sex comparisons have nonetheless tested for them, and it is not known how common such practices are. However, Kaiser and colleagues (Kaiser et al., 2009, p. 54) have argued that because sex is a primary and ubiquitous social category, classifying participants by sex is a 'natural default' and is 'seemingly effortless and obvious in brain research.' They have also noted that, in comparisons of pathological groups with controls, 'introducing sex/gender as a supplementary factor augments the possibilities for differentiating the groups from each other', offering additional opportunities for publishing.

Wallentin (2009), moreover, has pointed out that functional neuroimaging studies are especially vulnerable to false-positive sex/gender results, due to nuisance variables (like breathing rate and caffeine intake) that affect the imaging signal, and that this is particularly an issue when sample sizes are small. In line with this, (Thirion et al., 2007) demonstrated the low reliability of fMRI studies with samples of less than 20, due to large inter-subject variability. Likewise, in their discussion of cultural influences on brain function, Park & Huang (2010) have noted the particular vulnerability of group comparisons to false-positive results in fMRI research. In particular, they argue that the vast numbers of data points as outcome measures, together with comparisons between groups that are likely to vary

systematically in ways other than the cultural values of experimental interest, indicate the need 'to test specific hypotheses in regions of interest and limit the amount of neural "real estate" under investigation, increasing the prospects of finding interpretable, replicable differences that are related to cultural values and beliefs [rather than other factors not of interest]' (p. 397).

Clearly, if the scope for false-positive results is not handled carefully the outcome will be a scientific literature littered with false-positive findings of sex/gender differences. Exacerbating this publication bias is its institutionalization in reporting practices and research database keywords, meaning that the scientific literature can be readily searched for sex/gender differences, but not similarities (Kaiser et al., 2009). Thus, even if data disconfirming an earlier false-positive result are obtained *and* reported, unless substantive efforts are made to find null results, false-positive claims may potentially continue to persist in the scientific literature.

A good demonstration of these issues is provided by investigations of the long-standing hypothesis that the male brain is more lateralized than the female brain for language processing. A heavily cited early fMRI investigation of this hypothesis gave 19 men and 19 women phonological, orthographic, and semantic processing tasks to perform while being scanned (Shaywitz et al., 1995). Left-lateralization of inferior frontal gyrus activity was found in men for phonological processing, but no such lateralization was observed for women. No sex/gender differences were observed for orthographic or semantic processing. Notably, the article title referred to the different pattern observed in the sexes for phonological processing, but not the similar patterns observed for orthographic and semantic processing (Kaiser et al., 2009). Subsequent data have been mixed and, overall, unsupportive of Shaywitz et al.'s positive finding: two recent large meta-analyses of functional neuroimaging studies of language lateralization failed to find evidence for sex/gender differences (Sommer, Aleman, Bouma, & Kahn,

2004; Sommer, Aleman, Somers, Boks, & Kahn, 2008).

Further demonstrating the need for skepticism with respect to the reliability of any one finding of a sex/gender difference, particularly when sample sizes are modest, Ihnen and colleagues found that the sex/gender differences in brain activity observed in a group of 13 men and 13 women during language processing failed to generalize to similar language tasks within a second group of 10 men and 10 women. Moreover, identical analyses of the same participants ‘discovered’ brain activation differences between randomly created groups matched on sex, performance, and obvious demographic characteristics (Ihnen, Church, Petersen, & Schlaggar, 2009).

Importantly, arguments that false-positive findings are not of major concern because the research literature will soon identify them as such are weakened by the failure of disputations of the Shaywitz finding to penetrate the literature, even 15 years post-publication. In 2009 and 2010 the Shaywitz article was cited more than 90 times. Over half of all relevant citations during this period failed to acknowledge the existence of any contradictory data whatsoever, and less than a fifth adequately cited one or other of the large-scale meta-analytic studies conducted by Sommer and colleagues (Fine, 2013). This example does not inspire confidence that the influence of false-positive findings of sex/gender differences in the literature will diminish in a timely fashion, and underlines the cost of producing them in the first place (Simmons et al., 2011).

Despite the practical reality of the issue of false-positive findings of sex/gender differences, there are no standard neuroscientific practices in place to address it. Indeed, the problem is exacerbated by the common use of small sample sizes. Within the 2009/2010 sample of fMRI studies of sex/gender differences, it was as common for studies to have fewer than 10 participants in each of their groups of interest (in many studies the sexes were further subdivided, for example by clinical status or experimental condition) as they

were to have more than 20 participants in each experimental cell (Fine, 2013).

## SCIENTIFIC NEUROSEXISM?

In summary, although fMRI has scope to be a powerful tool in the understanding of gender, there are a number of obstacles involved in its use to this end; they are poorly navigated sufficiently commonly in the literature as to raise justifiable concerns. First, the predominant ‘catalogue of differences’ approach leaves unexplored experiential contributions to observed sex/gender differences, the socio-biological processes by which they arise, and the conditions under which they are seen, and to what extent. A further consequence of this failure to consider the critical and integral role of experience in neurobiological development and function is that no data can be produced that challenge the implicit notion of ‘hardwired’ male/female neural signatures. Second, while exploratory research plays an important role in science, the willingness of researchers to perform male/female comparisons in the absence of well-developed neuro-cognitive accounts opens the door to post hoc, stereotype-consistent interpretations of functionally ambiguous brain data that can then proliferate in a piecemeal fashion, empirically uncontested. Third, common research practices support the production, reporting, influence, and persistence of false-positive findings of sex/gender differences.

Together, these three features of the research act to the detriment of scientific progress in understanding sex influences on the brain. But in addition, they yield a literature implicitly biased towards the presentation of sex/gender differences as ‘hardwired’, likely to be psychologically significant, and numerous, a presentation that is in keeping with the idea of deep-rooted, permanent, and distinct male versus female ‘essences’ (for overview of theory and data on psychological essentialism, see Haslam & Whelan, 2008). This bias in the literature serves to reinforce and legitimate traditional gender stereotypes and

roles, a phenomenon that becomes especially clear when popular representations of the literature are considered.

### ***Popular Neurosexism and its Harmful Effects***

Scientific claims regarding sex/gender differences in the brain do not remain locked in scientific journals and books, but permeate the popular media. It can be argued that the subtle forms of neurosexism in the scientific literature described above contribute to and licence popular forms of neurosexism (see Fine, 2013). First, a number of scientists have rightly criticized popular writers for false assertions that any sex differences observed in the brain must be ‘hardwired’ (e.g., Eliot, 2011a; Fine, 2010; Halpern, 2010). Yet the ‘catalogue of differences’ research approach implicitly reinforces – or at the very least fails to challenge – the notion of ‘hardwired’ sex differences. Arguably, if the scientific literature were full of studies exploring the plasticity of sex/gender differences in the brain – how, for example, they vary across time, culture, socioeconomic status, gendered experience, social context – popular writers would be less able to assume and assert that they are ‘hardwired’.

Second, it seems plausible that the willingness of scientists to offer speculative, post hoc psychological interpretations of sex/gender differences in brain activity, to draw on gender stereotypes to do so, and to fail to subject them to empirical test, makes it easier for popular commentators to do the same. While some claims made by popular writers appear to be works of pure fiction, in other instances they are recognizable elaborations and extensions of hypotheses, interpretations, and speculations made by researchers themselves. One obvious example are scientific suggestions that sex differences in lateralization underlie male superiority in mathematical, visual-spatial, and perhaps other male-typical cognitive domains (e.g., Baron-Cohen, Knickmeyer, & Belmonte, 2005; Gur & Gur, 2007; Gur et al., 1999; Kolata, 1983) that are then presented

in exaggerated and over-confident form in the popular literature (e.g., Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Pease & Pease, 2008).

Finally, clearly the greater the volume of false-positive results that exist in the literature, the more scope there is for popular writers to make claims about sex/gender differences in the brain that will ultimately prove to be false. In addition, the scientific community itself does not always set a good example in terms of how such findings should be treated. For instance, Eliot (2011a) recently criticized popular writers for cherry-picking spurious findings, using as an example references in the popular media to Shaywitz et al.’s (1995) finding of male lateralization (in one of three language tasks), despite the null conclusion of two meta-analytic investigations of the hypothesis. Yet, as noted earlier, the same problem is frequently observed in the scientific literature itself (Fine, 2013).

It may be anticipated that claims about sex/gender differences in the brain and their implications for how and why males and females behave differently will have psychological consequences (see Fine, 2013). Hacking (1995, p. 351) has described ‘looping’ or ‘feedback effects in cognition and culture’, whereby the causal understanding of a particular social group changes the very character of the group, leading to further change in causal understanding. Similarly, Choudhury and colleagues, referring specifically to the social impact of neuroscience, have argued that the representation of ‘brain facts’ in the media, policy, and lay perceptions influence society in ways that can affect the very mental phenomena under investigation (Choudhury, Nagel, & Slaby, 2009). Indeed, ‘brain facts’ may enhance how satisfactory or valuable lay-people judge scientific explanations of psychological phenomena to be (Michael, Newman, Vuorre, Cumming, & Garry, 2013; Morton, Haslam, Postmes, & Ryan, 2006; Weisberg, Keil, Goodstein, Rawson, & Gray, 2008), which is also reflected in the way that neuroscience findings tend to be presented in the popular media (Racine, Bar-Ilan, & Illes, 2005; Racine, Waldman, Rosenberg, & Illes, 2010).

Three lines of research offer insights into the psychological effects of claims about sex differences in the brain and, in particular, implications that gender differences are ‘essential’ (see Fine, 2012). First, preliminary evidence looking at the effects of information about the reasons for gender differences in mathematics on performance suggests that the spontaneous assumption that gender differences are ‘biologically’ caused may have detrimental effects on performance (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2006; Thoman, White, Yamawaki, & Koishi, 2008).

Second, both the endorsement of ‘biological’ explanations of gender differences, and exposure to such accounts, are associated with greater endorsement of gender stereotypes (Brescoll & LaFrance, 2004; Martin & Parker, 1995) and more stereotypical self-perception (Coleman & Hong, 2008). This is merely one example of a general tendency for biological essentialist beliefs to be associated with endorsement of a wide variety of social stereotypes (Bastian & Haslam, 2006).

Third, there is evidence that a stronger weighting of genetic influence on behavior is associated with greater moral tolerance of the social status quo (Dambrun, Kamiejski, Haddadi, & Duarte, 2009; Keller, 2005). It has been argued that the belief that differences between social groups are biologically essential naturalizes inequality and serves a system-justifying function, both in general (Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997) and specifically in relation to gender (Bem, 1993). Supporting such a motivated system-justifying basis for biological essentialist accounts of gender, Morton and colleagues found links between essentialist beliefs and sexism in men only, and only when women were presented as gaining ground on men. Conversely, they also showed that scientific claims about gender influenced endorsement of hierarchy legitimizing beliefs and attitudes (Morton, Haslam, & Hornsey, 2009; see also Morton, this volume).

In short, erroneous scientific claims are not cost-free. ‘Brain facts’ about sex differences make their way into popular culture where

they may influence the very mental phenomena under investigation. In this way, independent of their truth, neurosexism may affect people’s lives and society in self-fulfilling ways.

## **THE NEUROSCIENTIFIC INVESTIGATION OF SEX/GENDER: FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

We have clearly progressed a great deal, both scientifically and socially, since the days when brain scientists attributed females’ intellectual inferiority to ‘the missing five ounces’ of female brain (Romanes, 1887/2001, p. 23), with such scientific understandings serving as a reactionary force against hopes for movement toward greater educational, occupational, and social roles for women (Russett, 1989). Nonetheless, the current situation echoes the past. A research approach implicitly biased towards presenting sex/gender differences in the brain as ‘hardwired’, psychologically significant, and extensive, subtly supports an essentialist view of the sexes. This conception of the sexes ‘erases the effect of the social world in producing sex/gender differences’, argue Jordan-Young & Rumiati (2012, p. 115), ‘so that sex/gender hierarchies appear natural’. The question of future directions for this area of research therefore requires not just considerations of how to improve the epistemic quality of the research, but to take account of the political values embedded within it.

With regard to the first goal, there is clear need for discussion as to how research practices should be changed in order to improve the quality of the science, and the issues outlined here provide a useful starting-point in terms of suggestions. First, fMRI research needs to move beyond static and uninformative ‘catalogue of differences’ comparisons between the sexes (Jordan-Young & Rumiati, 2012). Gendered behavior shows substantial within-group variation that is influenced by factors such as historical period, nationality, experience, and social context. Neuroscientific

research will only contribute to rich explanations of gender if research is guided by a sophisticated conceptual understanding of the phenomenon. Jordan-Young & Rumiati (2012, p. 118) have recently made recommendations along such lines, suggesting greater exploration of neural plasticity, as well as consideration of the ways variation arising from other social categories – such as social class, occupation, and nationality – impact sex/gender differences (see also Kurtiş & Adams, Chapter 16 this volume). As they point out, such a research approach ‘might provide much more illumination on the concrete mechanisms through which the social world shapes behavior, and even becomes embodied (brain) difference.’

The second major issue concerns functional implications of sex/gender differences in the brain – both how this is investigated and the speculations or interpretations that are made. Better progress toward understanding any functional implications of sex/gender differences in the brain would be achieved by a move away from an approach dominated by piecemeal, atheoretical research, untested speculations, and makeshift tinkering with brain–mind assumptions, towards the systematic development and testing of predictions derived from well-developed neurocognitive accounts of the development of male/female disparities.

The final issue concerns the problem of false-positive findings of sex/gender differences in functional neuroimaging studies. Potential strategies to ameliorate this problem could include a move towards larger sample sizes, greater use of meta-analytic techniques, journal requirements to replicate findings or report all effect sizes regardless of significance, greater emphasis on null findings on the part of authors and editors, and facilitated access to null findings within scientific databases. More radically, a potential model for statistical reform comes from the shift in medicine, from null hypothesis significance testing, to the reporting of effect sizes and confidence intervals and introduction of requirements for findings to be placed in the

context of a systematic review of the current relevant data to date (Fidler, 2011). Interestingly, this statistical upheaval was motivated primarily by ethical concerns regarding the scientific and social costs of error. As Fidler argues, and this chapter also illustrates, such costs should also be considered for psychological research.

This point leads to the second necessary goal for future directions in this area of research; namely, the need to consider the role of political values. These values are most obvious when it comes to what research questions are asked. For example, significant research attention is devoted to seeking the neural correlates of generally small, unestablished, or even non-existent behavioral differences between groups divided on the basis of biological sex, while relatively little energy is devoted to exploring the role of experiential factors in neurobiological development of male/female disparities. Given the power hierarchy and inequalities embedded in gender as a social system, this has political ramifications in terms of which groups benefit from what knowledge is produced, as well as from what knowledge is *not* produced (for empirical demonstrations of the influence of group level implications of sex/gender scientific findings for its perceived value, see Morton et al., 2006; Morton et al., 2009).

But political values are also integral to the internal research process. As Douglas (2007) has noted, in the course of their research scientists must make decisions about methodologies, statistical methods, background assumptions, interpretation, emphasis, and assessments of which forms of uncertainty are tolerable (for related discussions, see Douglas, 2008; Haslam & McGarty, 2001). These decisions build layer upon layer of potential error into the scientific ‘facts’ that are ultimately produced. While epistemic values clearly play an important role in deciding which is the ‘best’ decision to make, Douglas argues that so too can political and social priorities. Take, for example, the question of methodological decisions – such as sample size, or the use of statistical analyses that shift the balance of probability in favor



of false-positive rather than false-negative results (Bluhm, 2013) – in sex/gender comparisons. The ‘best’ decision depends, in part, on whether we care more about the social cost of missing a true difference, or of ‘finding’ a false one. Thus, epistemic values alone cannot determine the appropriate decision. Similarly, epistemic values alone cannot dictate the appropriate evidentiary standards for a sex/gender difference (or similarity) to be emphasized in an article title or discussion section. Comprehensive improvement in the science requires the role of political values in the research process to be openly acknowledged and directly addressed, challenged, and defended (Haslam & McGarty, 2001).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the current state of research suggests an urgent need for greater interdisciplinary collaboration – most obviously between neuroscientists and gender theorists, but also with philosophers who can help develop a framework for managing the role of political values in sex/gender research. Such collaborations would surely provide a promising route to research that is more rigorous, less unreflectively supportive of the status quo, and that brings a conceptually sophisticated understanding of gender to the ever-increasing potential of neuroscience to reveal its material substantiation in the brain.

## NOTE

- 1 This chapter follows scholars who argue that although sex and gender are importantly separable conceptually, it is not possible for neuroscientists to categorize and measure a purely biological variable ‘sex’ separately to a social variable ‘gender’, and thus recommend the term sex/gender ‘to highlight this socio-biological intertwinement’ (Kaiser, Haller, Schmitz, & Nitsch, 2009, p. 50).

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# Gender and Discourse

Tim Kurz and Ngaire Donaghue

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, women have tended to be ignored in psychological research, or, when attention has been paid, it has been to document the ways in which women deviated from the ‘normal’ male subject of psychological research. Inspired by the critiques of second wave feminism, in the 1970s and 1980s psychologists began listening to women’s voices using qualitative methods. While this attention to women’s voices was important and overdue, straightforward description of women’s accounts of their own experiences misses other aspects of the wider experience of living in a gendered world. Voices speak in languages, and the kinds of discourses that are available in the languages with which we speak shape and limit what we can say about our experience.

Discursive approaches in psychology arose as part of the wider ‘turn to language’ in the social sciences, and in this chapter we will outline the theoretical bases of a discursive approach and how it differs from other approaches. We will also reflect upon the historical intellectual antecedents of these ideas and examine some key dimensions of theoretical and methodological heterogeneity

within contemporary discursive research. We then review the ways in which this foregrounding of language has provided new insights into topics of longstanding concern for gender researchers, such as sexual violence. Finally, we demonstrate how a discursive lens can also open up new kinds of questions about the ways in which our lived experiences of gender are produced by, and reproduce, gendered cultural discourses, such as discourses of ‘postfeminism’.

## DISCOURSE AS A FOCUS OF INVESTIGATION

What do we mean when we refer to ‘discourse’ and its analysis? Put most simply, when we refer to ‘discourse’ we are referring to ‘all forms of spoken talk and written text’ (Tuffin, 2005, p. 87). In discursive work, it is these forms of spoken talk and written text that constitute the object of empirical investigation – the data that one analyses. Although there are many nuanced distinctions made by different scholars who take discourse as their object of study (see the next section), what is shared by all such approaches is a theoretical commitment to seeing discourse (i.e., talk and text) as *constructing* (a version

of) social reality and as producing social and material consequences.

This view of language as socially constitutive can be contrasted with the typical conceptualization of language within more cognitive, quantitative approaches in psychology. Within these more mainstream models of psychological inquiry, what people say (either by ticking a box on a questionnaire, filling in an open-ended response, or by talking in an interview) is generally treated as interesting in specific relation to what it might reveal about internal cognitive representations (e.g., attitudes towards a social object, identification with a social group, or levels of self-esteem). Thus, there is an interest in what people say because of its ability to tell us something of what they think about social objects in the world (such as 'women', 'feminists', or 'the self'). From a discursive perspective, however, the various features and categories that make up the social world are seen as being constructed *by and through* language. Language is seen not as a transparent mechanism for describing things in the world (or inside one's own head) as they already exist, but rather as a means of constructing and forming the meaning of things – as the means by which 'social reality' comes into being.

This *social constructionist* aspect of discourse is one of the most central features of a discursive approach. However, discursive approaches are clearly not the only approaches to studying gender that are grounded in social constructionist epistemology. Much of the mainstream social psychological work on gender also proceeds from an assumption that the constellation of attributes that are attached to each gender at a given point in time are a product of cultural and social processes, rather than reflecting some essential, immutable, and objective 'reality' of gender. Indeed, a good deal of this work is conducted with an explicit view to understanding constructions of gender in order to change them in ways that reduce oppression and lead to more equal opportunities and outcomes for women and

men. Where such work differs from discursive work, however, is in the focus of its attention. Non-discursive social constructionist work tends to conceptualize gender as a socially constructed concept that, although historically changeable, can be thought of as relatively stable for periods of time. Gender is thus understood as something that (although not 'natural') has been made 'real' and which has effects that can be measured. It is the nature and effects of variation in the elements of gender ('masculine' and 'feminine' attributes, gender stereotypes, sex roles, aspects of gender ideology, etc.) that are the subject of empirical research efforts that seek to (a) measure these effects and (b) identify relationships among elements of gender and other aspects of experience and behavior.

Discursive approaches, on the other hand, are not primarily concerned with measured differences in gendered attributes and their social consequences, but rather in the interactional processes by which gender is brought into everyday life. Moreover, they focus upon the reciprocal way in which discourse around gender renders some types of experiences and actions as intelligible and 'normal' (and others as strange and 'weird') and, in so doing, shapes and constrains the behavior of women and men in ways that reproduce and naturalize particular constructions of gender.

## VARIATIONS IN THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF DISCURSIVE APPROACHES AND SOME METHODOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The term 'discursive' is a broad banner that subsumes a range of particular approaches that vary along both epistemological and methodological dimensions. In this section we describe these dimensions of difference and give the reader a taste of the different ways in which questions about gender are conceptualized and investigated from these different perspectives.



### **Theoretical Distinctions**

One way that different approaches to the analysis of discourse in psychology can be delineated is in terms of their theoretical and analytic focus. Whilst such variations in focus are varied and complex, one often-invoked distinction revolves around the difference between approaches that are described as ‘top-down’ in focus and those that are more ‘bottom-up’. Top-down approaches to analyzing talk and text concentrate upon the constitutive power of discourse and an examination of the psycho-discursive resources that make up the ‘discursive economy’ that cultural members operate within (Willig, 2001). These approaches to gender are grounded in Foucauldian understandings of discourse that are concerned with the ways in which various institutional practices, such as the practice of ‘science’ (including psychology) or the regulation and government of people, produce social discourses or ‘regimes of truth’ that form the subjectivity of those they ‘describe’ and regulate. Discourses are what make certain things normal and unremarkable and other things deviant and strange. Foucauldian analyses are centered around the contention that *systems produce subjects*; that is, that social discourses discipline and regulate people, producing in them a subjectivity that more or less matches the agendas of the power/knowledge regime in which those discourses are created. Such approaches often conceptualize the notion of ‘discourse’ as having a degree of ‘out-there-ness’ to it, in the sense that one might speak of a particular ‘discourse’ being in operation within a society or culture. Thus, this notion of ‘*a* discourse’ bestows upon it a socially constitutive property that is in some senses separated from the individual talk of individual cultural members. Within psychology, these approaches are often referred to under such names as ‘Foucauldian discourse analysis’ (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008; Henriques, Holloway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984; Parker, 1992), ‘critical discourse analysis’

(Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 1993) or ‘feminist poststructuralist’ approaches (Gavey, 1989, 1997). In sum, these top-down approaches are concerned with the ways in which certain taken-for-granted ‘truths’ work within society to construct a version of the social world that constrains the possibilities and opportunities for groups and individuals to experience and act within that social world in particular ways.

In contrast, approaches that might be described as more ‘bottom-up’ in nature have as their focus a more fine-grained analysis of the ways in which everyday talk is ordered and produced in the context of actual ongoing social interaction (i.e., *in situ*). Such perspectives have their intellectual roots in the early ethnomethodological work of Garfinkel (1967) and the subsequent development of these ideas into what has become known as Conversation Analysis (CA), initially by Sacks (reprinted as Sacks, 1995) and then further by collaborators such as Schegloff, Jefferson, and Pomerantz (Pomerantz, 1986; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1984; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

These ideas have been brought into social psychology in the past few decades primarily through the work of the Discourse Analysis and Rhetoric Group (DARG) at Loughborough University in the United Kingdom. DARG and its affiliates have been primarily responsible for the development of ‘Discursive Psychology’ (DP), an approach that applies the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological commitments of CA to the examination of a range of domains previously dominated by more mainstream psychological interrogation, such as ‘memory’, ‘identity’, and ‘emotion’ (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Potter, 1992). Within these approaches, the focus of examination is less upon the identification of how discourses operate in a socially constitutive way ‘out there’ in society. Rather, the concern is more with providing a detailed inspection of the ways in which specific instances of social interaction are ordered and structured and the common processes that



can be identified as operating across a broad range of such instances.

It should be noted, however, that these two approaches ('bottom-up' and 'top-down') are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Indeed some discursive researchers prefer to think of the examination of discursive resources and discursive practices as a 'twin focus' of scholarly discursive analyses, rather than as competing approaches *per se* (e.g., Kurz, Augoustinos, & Crabb, 2010; Phillips, 2000; Wetherell, 1998).

To further clarify some of the distinctions between these two approaches, and to begin to focus more directly on the topic of concern in this volume, we now consider the different ways in which one might seek to interrogate gender-related topics from within more 'top-down' and more 'bottom-up' approaches to the analysis of discourse. First, from a more top-down perspective, researchers are interested in such questions as by what means gendered subjects are positioned through discourse – that is, how the very nature of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' are constructed through socially pervasive ways of talking about these notions.

Discourses of gender weave together expert knowledge, institutional practice, symbolic representations, and 'raw' experience into a powerful edifice that simultaneously proscribes what is normal, correct, moral, or beneficial and provides the means through which deviation from these proscriptions are exposed and regulated (Foucault, 1972, 1994). This understanding of discourse as a crucial site of power is responsible for discursive work being so widely understood as 'critical psychology' and why discursive approaches to gender are generally feminist.

Top-down discursive approaches to studying gender involve examining how discourses construct both 'gender' and the experiences of 'women' and 'men'. They often do so with a view to showing how an apparently benign discourse can work to produce some form of discrimination or oppression. In this way they reflect feminist concerns with challenging the 'naturalness' of the status quo. For example,

in her seminal work, Holloway (1984) identifies a range of gendered discourses that function to order the nature of power relations between men and women in society. She highlights the role of what she refers to as the 'male sex drive discourse' – the cultural 'common sense' notion that can be identified within societal discourse that men (and *specifically* men) have a putative biological 'need' or 'urge' to engage in sexual activity. As Holloway argues, the implications of this discourse are highly consequential in a variety of settings, both within heterosexual relationships more generally and in terms of how the judicial system orients towards men who commit acts of sexual assault or harassment towards women, a point to which we will return in the next section.

In contrast, bottom-up approaches to the study of 'gender discourse' are more concerned with how gender is made relevant by speakers themselves in their talk and the ways in which gender categories are used within interaction. Here, the focus is less on the ways in which gendered subjects are positioned through discourse and more on interrogating the category of gender '*as it appears in people's talk*' (Stokoe & Smithson, 2001, p. 219, emphasis in original). A well-articulated example of this more bottom-up approach (and its comparison with a more top-down approach to the same topic, cf. Wetherell & Edley, 1999) can be found in Speer's (2005) work on the functioning of masculinity within interaction. Speer demonstrates in her analysis the context-sensitive ways in which men can construct the nature of 'masculinity' and align with, or differentiate themselves from, these constructions across a conversation. She shows how the very same men can construct masculinity, in their talk, in a multitude of ways (e.g., as 'extreme', as 'self-confidence', as 'inauthentic'). Moreover, the particular constructions mobilized achieve particular situated conversational business at a specific point in the unfolding interaction. For example, in one instance, a participant ('Ben'), having previously distanced himself from 'typical blokes' who engage in stereotypically adolescent-male

behavior around drug and alcohol use, suddenly constructs his own behavior in very stereotypically masculine terms in response to a particular question from the interviewer. The particular question involved the interviewer referring to the potential 'riskiness' of Ben's recounted performance of a 'blow back' with a male friend during marijuana-smoking. Speer argues that hegemonic notions of masculinity become a participants' resource that male speakers may align themselves with, or distance themselves from, at the appropriate moment within social interaction. Managing this construction by the interviewer of a potentially problematic sexual identity constitutes one such moment. This is in contrast to a more top-down analysis of hegemonic masculinity that would treat the concept more as a constraining structure or normative feature from outside discourse that can be invoked by the *analyst* to explain what goes on in the interaction being analyzed.

### **Methodological considerations**

Whilst the theoretical distinction between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to examining discourse do not necessarily map directly or neatly onto particular methodological approaches, there are some general differences in methodology that can be identified across the two traditions. First, while both approaches use various forms of talk and text as their qualitative data for analysis, different traditions exhibit preferences for different *types* of qualitative data, which partly stem from the broad theoretical differences we have already identified above.

In the case of 'bottom up' approaches such as DP and CA there is a specific preference for what is typically referred to as 'naturally occurring' data (Potter, 2002). This is generally defined as data that would still have existed in the absence of the academic research project. For example, a radio interview or parliamentary debate would qualify as 'naturally occurring' data, whereas an interview or focus group conducted by (i.e., 'produced by') the social scientific researcher would not.

These preferences for naturally occurring data arise primarily out of the theoretical commitment of bottom-up approaches to examining the ways in which the social world is constructed *in situ*. As such, there is a preference for data that represent the way that social interaction happens naturally in the world, rather than the types of interactions that might come about as the result of the research activities of social scientists. Indeed CA and DP researchers often argue that interviews (in particular) may tell us little about how the social phenomena of interest work in the 'real world', but rather, tell us a lot about the specific social institution of 'The Research Interview' itself (Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Rather than conducting interviews and focus groups, CA and DP researchers prefer to find naturally occurring instances of interaction in the world that may have been conducted (and recorded) 'for other purposes'. Examples of such data include calls to customer complaint or telephone counseling lines (e.g., Hepburn & Potter, 2007; Stokoe & Edwards, 2007) or recordings of counseling or psychotherapy sessions (e.g., Silverman, 1997). However, depending on the topic of one's investigation, getting hold of such data is not always practical or ethically possible. For example, if one were interested in examining the methods by which sexual refusals are negotiated, in interaction, then one might 'ideally' wish to examine actual recordings of women (and men) 'doing' sexual refusals in the course of their everyday lives. However, short of installing microphones in the bedrooms of potential participants and waiting for such instances to happen (which would obviously raise a myriad of ethical problems), such data are simply not available for collection. As a result, researchers who work within a DP or CA framework will sometimes still make use of focus group (and to a lesser extent interview) data, as we will see in the example of some of the CA- and DP-inspired work around sexual refusals discussed in the following section.

Researchers adopting a more ‘top-down’ approach to the analysis of discourse tend to have a more inclusive approach with regards to the types of qualitative data that they regard as appropriate for analysis. Such approaches have a focus on studying the discursive resources that are available to people in accounting for aspects of the social world in which gender is implicated. As a result, data collected that are generated by the researcher in the context of interviews and focus groups are still considered to be of great interest. This is primarily because discourse produced in one context is regarded by those working within top-down approaches as potentially able to tell us something of interest about the broader socio-discursive context that extends beyond the immediate setting of the interview or focus group (Griffin, 2007).

### **A NEW LENS THROUGH WHICH TO EXAMINE EXISTING QUESTIONS**

Having outlined for the reader the basic underpinnings of the discursive approach, how it differs from other approaches to examining gender, and having introduced some of the ways in which discursive research can vary in approach, we will now unpack these ideas using examples from the empirical research literature. In this section we take the topic of rape as an example to demonstrate that a discursive approach can often provide unique insights that further enrich understandings gleaned from more traditional forms of psychological inquiry, such as perceptions of vignettes. We will also use our review of the discursive and conversation analytic literature on this topic to provide the reader with a comparison between some of the dimensions of difference *within* discursive work that were outlined in the previous section.

### ***Non-discursive Research into the Phenomenon of Rape***

The past four decades have seen dramatic changes in public opinion towards rape in

Western culture and in the handling of rape cases by Western legal systems. Some forms of rape have always been unambiguously viewed as a heinous crime – such as those perpetrated by the archetypal, psychotic, unknown stranger in a dark alley. However, these acts were traditionally viewed as rare and unfortunate occurrences against which (‘respectable’ and ‘chaste’) women could (and indeed should) protect themselves by way of appropriate precautions. Forms of rape that fell outside of this narrow set of circumstances were, until more recent times, often dismissed by the legal system and society more generally as simply ‘just sex’ (Lafree, 1989). Research into the issue of rape within the social sciences more broadly, and psychology more specifically, can be seen to have both emerged from, and played a role in, some quite marked shifts in societal conceptualizations of rape since the early 1970s. The scholarship and grass-roots activism of second-wave feminism around rape in the 1970s challenged the notion of rape as an ‘unfortunate occurrence’ and sought to establish a recognition of it as an act (and symptom) of patriarchal oppression (Bevacqua, 2000). These analyses (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Clark & Lewis, 1977; Griffin, 1977) provided the critical lens through which researchers within social psychology and sociology came to approach a number of landmark pieces of research in the early 1980s that have further helped to challenge traditional Western understandings of rape.

Firstly, the sociological work of Russell (1982, 1984) and psychological work of Koss and colleagues (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987) fundamentally questioned prevailing wisdom regarding the prevalence of rape in society by reconceptualizing the methods by which such rates are measured. Secondly, Burt (1980; Burt & Estep, 1981) conducted a quantitative analysis of the level of support for the types of prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape and rape victims (i.e., ‘rape myths’) that had been highlighted by feminist scholars in the late 1970s (e.g., ‘a woman who goes to the home or apartment of

a man on their first date implies that she is willing to have sex', Burt, 1980, p. 217). This work highlighted that forced sex that occurred within a non-stranger scenario was far less likely to be categorized by participants as 'rape'. Whilst this tendency to regard forced sex by acquaintances as 'not rape' was found to reduce across the late 1980s and into the 1990s, more recent work still documents a tendency for participants to regard such instances as 'less serious' as a function of the perceived closeness of relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (Bridges, 1991; Cook, 1995; Grubb & Harrower, 2008; Johnson & Russ, 1989).

Burt's early work has led to a raft of research within mainstream social psychology examining the relationships between rape myth acceptance within individual people and a range of other attitudinal and behavioral variables including attributions of fault and blame in hypothetical scenarios (see Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidycz, 2011 for a recent review). Whilst such work has played (and continues to play) an important role in understanding and potentially changing the ways in which society understands and responds to rape, discursive researchers have identified certain methodological and epistemological features of this form of inquiry that leave some key questions unexamined. We will now turn our attention to these concerns, and, in so doing, consider the slightly different perspectives that a discursive lens brings to the topic of sexual violence.

### ***Discursive Perspectives on the Phenomenon of Rape***

One aspect of rape perception research in experimental social psychology that has been highlighted by discursive researchers is the potential for experimental methods to risk 'decontextualizing, individualizing, and simplifying the processes of sense-making and argumentation when participants build and sustain victim-blaming positions in accounts for rape' (Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p. 45).

Indeed it has been suggested by some researchers that the use of quantitative scales of measurement within the typical vignette studies employed in experimental rape perception research (and the increasing tendency towards overall low mean scores on such dependent measures) risks the creation of a false impression that contemporary feminist claims about a rape-supportive culture may be exaggerated or 'out-dated'. It has been argued that the quantitative methods employed in mainstream social psychological work may not necessarily always be suitable for capturing the rhetorical subtlety that pervades contemporary social reasoning around rape (Pollard, 1992).

From a discursive perspective, if one is interested in understanding and analyzing the complex business of how cultural members explain, account for, and respond to a practice such as rape, then one needs to consider employing methods that are well placed to examine these processes directly. A suitable method should therefore include the direct analysis of how both men and women talk about, make sense of, and account for the phenomenon. An example of such work is Anderson and Doherty's (2008) research, which brings a more discursive flavor to the traditional vignette paradigm of mainstream social psychological research on attributions of blame in rape. In these studies, male-female dyads were asked to participate in an open-ended and unstructured discussion of a vignette that was based on the media reporting of a real rape case in the United Kingdom at the time. Thus, the data for analysis were transcripts of recordings of relatively free-flowing conversations, rather than the ticking of pre-defined categorical response options on a questionnaire. Anderson and Doherty demonstrate through their discursive analyses of these discussions the subtle ways in which the rape victim is 'worked up' as being culpable through her failure to recognize the 'risks of modern life'. For example<sup>1</sup>:

Alison: yeah but I dunno it reflects that women always have to be careful I mean I know blokes get beaten up and stuff but (.) you know you can still walk home and stuff like that

Frank: oh well yeah I know it's not fair but its (.) life innit

Alison: mm (.) I mean so that implies that this poor woman has to spend her whole life looking over her shoulder and [inaudible]

Frank: [no not at all] but if you walk back take the lit way where it's like well lit up instead of taking this huge short cut across the badly lit field or whatever

(Anderson & Doherty, 2008, p. 74)

What Anderson and Doherty are able to highlight through their discursive analyses of data extracts of this type is how talk around rape works to socially construct female rape victims *as* potentially blameworthy. Moreover, it does so in ways that are often more subtle than the more traditional 'she was asking for it' tropes that feature in the dependent measures utilized in quantitative attribution studies within mainstream social psychology. Furthermore, in their analyses of these open, non-moderated discussions, Anderson and Doherty are able to highlight the ways in which the rapist effectively disappears from these accounts, featuring only as 'a sub-human figure without agency ... merely part of the "hazard/risk" that the alleged victim must deal with' (p. 82).

In addition to this largely methodological critique of quantitative rape perception research by Anderson and Doherty (1998, 2008), feminist poststructuralist researchers have provided even more fundamental discursive critiques of mainstream rape research. In her text *Just Sex? The Cultural Scaffolding of Rape*, Gavey (2005) turns a critical lens on the expectations of normative heterosexuality (what is typically referred to as 'just sex'), which she argues work to normalize rape. Rather than focusing on the need to change attitudes towards what does or does not 'count' as rape (as do the more traditional social psychological examinations), Gavey focuses instead upon the potential gray area that exists in society between what constitutes 'rape' and 'just sex'. Moreover, she suggests that this gray area should perhaps be interrogated in terms of what it says about normative

practices within the confines of heterosexual relationships, rather than assuming that it merely reflects 'misunderstandings' or 'false beliefs' about the phenomenon of rape. Put differently, this gray area between 'rape' and 'just sex' is perhaps something that *explains* (the existence of rape) rather than the thing that one should be seeking *to explain* (in order to prevent rape). She suggests that the language and practice of (much) normative heterosex contributes to a range of taken-for-granted assumptions that set up the possibilities for rape, particularly within situations where the parties involved are engaged in some form of intimate relationship.

Gavey's (2005) analysis interrogates a range of dominant discourses of heterosexuality in relation to how they reinforce gendered relations of power that potentially compromise women's choices and control in heterosex. We will focus here on one of these – the male sexual drive discourse. As we outlined earlier in relation to Holloway's (1984) formative work, the male sexual drive discourse relates to the culturally pervasive societal construction of the (biological) 'need' or 'urge' for men to have sex, which is often represented as 'uncontrollable' and (at its extreme) something that can potentially overwhelm and deny personal agency or accountability. Gavey (2005) highlights the prevalence of this discourse of male 'need' for sex in 20th century 'relationship guides' for married couples, such as Dr Eichenlaub's (1961) advice in a popular manual of the period for women to '*always* meet their husbands' sexual requirements unless frank disability keeps them from performing their usual household or working duties or specific disorders of the sex organs themselves make intercourse impossible' (p. 36, cited in Gavey, 2005, emphasis in original). Furthermore, Potts' (1998) analyses of the well-known John Gray 'Mars and Venus' series demonstrates that such formulations of sexual relationship 'advice' are still prevalent in more contemporary pop-psychology texts, albeit under a veil of attendance to women's sexual pleasure. For example, in the best-selling 1995 volume *Mars and Venus*



*in the Bedroom: A Guide to Lasting Romance and Passion*, Gray suggests that ‘when a man is aroused, he rediscovers the love hidden in his heart. Through sex, a man can feel, and through feeling, he can come back to his soul again’ (Gray, 1995, quoted in Potts, 1998, p. 158). Furthermore, Gray suggests that ‘feeling that he will not be rejected is essential for a man to continue to be passionately attracted to his partner’ and that ‘a woman’s acceptance of occasional quickies and a positive message whenever her partner initiates sex ensures lasting attraction and passion’ (Gray, 1995, quoted in Potts, 1998, p. 160). As Potts argues, despite being thinly wrapped in a veneer of women’s liberation rhetoric, the message of this popular heterosexual relationship ‘bible’ of the mid-1990s arguably reproduces the same male sexual drive discourses common to its 1960s counterparts. More recently, Gavey (2011) has provided an equally disarming example from the recent set of ‘25 Top Men’s Health Tips’ produced by celebrity US doctor ‘Dr Oz’, which included the following ‘tip’:

If a 50-something man could have sex 700 times a year, the exercise and stress reduction would make him look and feel years younger. I wouldn’t recommend quitting your day job in order to hit that number—but what’s the harm in trying? The next time your loved one says she has a headache, tell her she’s literally killing you. It works for me. (Oz, 2010).

Through a series of interviews with women and an analysis of their accounts of ‘everyday’ unwanted sex, Gavey (2005) shows how the cultural conditions of possibility that surround the practice of ‘normal’ heterosexual sex create a dynamic that can be seen to provide the cultural scaffolding that supports rape. Furthermore, she argues that when one considers the extent to which normative heterosex privileges men’s (putative) sexual interests over women’s, it becomes clear that a potential shortcoming of much social scientific research into rape (especially ‘date rape’) has been a ‘failure to put normative heterosexuality itself under the microscope for critical analysis’ (p. 98). Thus, we can see how

applying a discursive (poststructuralist) lens to a topic like rape leads us to a consideration of a set of sociocultural ‘antecedents’ of rape that might be missed if we were only to theorize and empirically examine the topic from a more traditional individualistic, cognitivist, and quantitative paradigm. It compels us to focus not only on the problems of individual-level attitudes and beliefs towards rape, but also to mount a fundamental challenge to the underpinnings of the ways in which heterosex itself is understood and practiced in society.

### ***A Discursive Perspective on Date-Rape Intervention Programs***

Having given a flavor of what a more ‘top-down’, poststructuralist discursive perspective in the area of rape can involve, we will now consider work that has investigated this same area from a more ‘bottom-up’, conversation analytic perspective. In particular, we focus here on the application of conversation analytic thinking by Kitzinger and Frith (1999) to the topic of sexual refusals in the context of ‘date rape’. In this work, Kitzinger and Frith take as their target for critical analysis the common practice within date-rape prevention programs of compelling women to ‘just say no’, clearly, directly, and unapologetically when confronted with a situation in which they are being invited to participate in sexual activity that is unwanted. Such approaches are also often coupled with slogans that call for men to understand that ‘no means no’. This approach, it has been argued, draws either implicitly or explicitly upon Tannen’s (1991) ‘miscommunication theory’ of date rape in which the man is seen as misinterpreting the woman’s verbal and nonverbal signals. Under such a theoretical presumption, the appropriate model of intervention becomes a focus on training women to be more ‘clear’ and ‘assertive’ in their refusals of sexual advances, that is, to ‘just say no’ (and in an appropriately firm tone of voice accompanied by eye contact).



Kitzinger and Frith (1999) argue, however, that the theoretical premise of the miscommunication model underpinning this approach becomes potentially problematic if one approaches the topic of sexual refusals from a conversational analytic perspective. A CA perspective focuses on empirically examining the ways in which social interaction is ordered and structured. As such, refusals, from this perspective, are seen as just one of the many conversational accomplishments that people regularly perform in everyday social interaction. For example, if a work colleague comes into one's office at 1pm and says 'hey, want to come for lunch?' and one does not (for whatever reason) desire to accept said lunch invitation then this requires the 'doing' of some form of refusal. As Kitzinger and Frith point out, however, a reading of the CA literature on the doing of refusals makes it clear that refusals in social interaction are actually *seldom* achieved through a blunt and assertive use of terms like 'no'. Rather, conversation analytic work on refusals (Davidson, 1984; Drew, 1984) has shown that they routinely involve at least some of the following features:

- 1 Delays (e.g., pauses and hesitations before responding).
- 2 Prefaces or 'hedges' (e.g., the use of terms such as 'uh' or 'well').
- 3 Palliatives such as appreciations, apologies, or token agreements that soften the blow of the refusal (e.g., 'I'd love to, but ...').
- 4 Explanations/justifications/excuses for turning down the invitation.

So, to return to our lunch example, even if one's actual reason for not wishing to accept the invitation simply related to a lack of desire to dine in that person's company on that particular occasion, it would be extremely non-normative (and indeed highly socially awkward) to immediately respond with an assertively-toned 'NO, I don't want to' whilst looking the person directly in the eye. As we all know from our experience as culturally competent members of society, a

more interactionally normative response would be to do something more like (a) hesitate, perhaps whilst looking around our cluttered desk, (b) engage in some elongated 'um's and 'well's, (c) say 'that *would* have been great, but', and (d) proceed to regale the invitee with a tale of woe about how busy we are and that we don't have time to break for lunch or that we already had a quick sandwich earlier.

Whilst negotiations of lunch invitations are clearly vastly less socially and materially consequential acts than are sexual refusals, an attendance to the CA work on these more 'mundane' refusals offers some important insights into why women might find it difficult to give clear, unambiguous, and direct 'no's in the bedroom. As Kitzinger and Frith (1999) argue, it is because this is simply not how refusals *are* (normatively) done. Ethical and practical considerations obviously preclude the analysis of how people actually do refusals in sexual situations, in a 'naturally occurring' sense. However, Kitzinger and Frith demonstrate through a series of focus groups with young women about their experiences with doing sexual refusals that women have an 'implicit understanding of the culturally accepted rules for refusals, as documented by conversation analysts' (p. 302). That is, women, as culturally competent members, know the 'script' for doing refusals in social situations. Furthermore, Kitzinger and Frith argue that it should not in fact be *necessary* for women to bear the burden of violating the norms of social interaction, by giving the kinds of responses advocated by 'just say NO' campaigns, in order to be understood as refusing sex. In addition, the use of slogans such as 'no means no' carries with it the potential implication that (more culturally normative) forms of refusal that *do not* involve direct 'no's should somehow be seen as *not being* 'real' refusals in a sexual context.

Thus, it is suggested that the root cause of the problem of date rape is not that women fail to communicate their refusal in a way that men can understand, but rather simply that men do not really like receiving sexual refusals.

Indeed, more recent work by O'Byrne, Rapley, and Hansen (2006) has demonstrated that young men do in fact have a refined ability to interpret and orient to more subtle forms both verbal and nonverbal sexual refusals.

What we hope to have demonstrated through our analysis of this work on sexual refusals is the way in which a more 'bottom-up' perspective, such as CA, with its focus on the more fine-grained analysis of how interaction unfolds, can also offer us a different and useful insight into the massively socially and materially consequential domain of rape and its prevention. As Kitzinger and Frith (1999) so eloquently put it, 'The slogan "yes means yes and no means no" may make a good campaign slogan, but it is neither a description of actual human behavior, nor a suitable prescription for dealing with sexual coercion' (p. 311).

## THE OPENING UP OF NEW QUESTIONS AND CONUNDRUMS

Most social psychological analyses of gender assign an important role to cultural discourses and ideologies around gender. However, the emphasis within discursive approaches on the continual reproduction of these discourses in the practices of everyday life and the close description of these practices can open up novel questions about how it is that these discourses become legitimized, how they connect with other discourses and ideological systems, and how they might be disrupted or resisted. To illustrate this point, we will now review discursive work analyzing the emerging discourses of 'empowerment', 'agency', and 'choice', and their role in producing a wider cultural discourse of 'postfeminism' in which the issues and concerns of feminism are seen as being outdated and unnecessary in contemporary life (c.f. McRobbie, 2009).

One of the longstanding criticisms of research and scholarship on gender that focuses on structural constraints on women and men is that it erases the notion of personal agency. In many ways, so-called 'third-wave' feminism

can be differentiated from the waves of feminism that preceded it by its strong focus on creating space in accounts of the actions and experiences of women and men that allow for agency (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). Much work in third-wave feminism responds to women's increasing presence in areas of public life outside of traditional sex roles. This throwing off of expectations about abilities, preferences, and appropriate behavior based on gender is taken as evidence that women are no longer oppressed and that feminism, having achieved its goals, can now be safely left in the past (e.g., McRobbie, 2009).

At the same time, this view that gender equality has been achieved (or is on a clear trajectory towards being achieved) in important public domains such as legal rights and educational and occupational opportunities has returned attention to apparently private issues around some of the embodied practices of femininity, such as make-up and fashion, hair removal, and other grooming practices (e.g., Jeffreys, 2005; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012), cosmetic surgery (Braun, 2009), and dressing 'sexy' (e.g., Amy-Chinn, 2006; Gill, 2007b). Third-wave feminists argue that too many feminine practices were given up too easily in the quest for equality, and that reclaiming these elements of femininity is a means of achieving equality and power for women *as* women, rather than by attempting to erase gender differences and become more like men (e.g., Baumgardner & Richards, 2005).

One of the features of sociocultural representations of gender in the first decade of the 21st century has been the dramatic change in the images of women (and increasingly men) that are portrayed in the media (Gill, 2007a). Changes include much more prevalent and explicit images of sexualized semi-nudity, but particularly striking is the ironic, playful, and otherwise 'not serious' tone of many of these images. As Gill notes, there is often a sense in which these images orient to their ability to be read as sexist, and by doing so manage to pre-empt and thus undermine traditional feminist critique (Gill, 2007a).

Gender researchers have investigated the impacts of these increasingly body-conscious and sexualized images of women and girls portrayed in Western media using quantitative methods. For example, objectification theory, developed by Fredrickson and her colleagues (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998) has generated a large amount of insightful research investigating the effects of these images on the women and girls who are routinely and massively exposed to them. Objectification theory (see Goldenberg et al., Chapter 24 this volume) argues that female bodies are constantly presented as objects to be looked at and evaluated (Tiggemann and Kuring, 2004), and that women and girls take on this observer's perspective and come to relate to themselves as objects whose value is at least in part determined by their appearance (Fredrickson et al., 1998). Objectification researchers frequently administer questionnaires (such as the self-objectification scale, Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) to measure the extent to which women and girls see themselves in this self-objectified way, and correlate scores on the self-objectification scale with measures of other psychological attributes such as self-esteem (Calogero, 2004) and body satisfaction (Tiggemann, 2001), and also with task performance. Fredrickson and colleagues (1998), for example, found that among young American women (but not men) self-objectification was negatively correlated with performance on a mathematics test, supporting the idea that self-objectification distracts from the performance of other activities (Fredrickson et al., 1998). In other words, objectification theory understands these socially constructed representations of women and girls as having psychological effects. Furthermore, it assumes that variability in the strength of these effects on individual girls and women can be measured and then correlated with other aspects of experience and behavior as a means of understanding the precise psychological impacts of exposure to these images.

These same body-conscious, sexualizing, and objectifying images have been responded

to in a different way by gender scholars taking a discursive approach. For discursive scholars, these images are part of a wider cultural sensibility around issues of gender that has become known as postfeminism (e.g., Gill, 2007b). Scholars such as Gill, McRobbie, and others have argued that the discourse of postfeminism with its emphasis on 'empowerment' has gained wide credence because of its alignment with neoliberal ideology and its emphasis on individuality, choice, and self-responsibility. Recent discursive work on gender has begun to examine constructions of 'agency' within postfeminist discourse. Often these analyses focus on women's engagement in practices that might, in a 'traditional' feminist analysis, be understood as entailing some element of coercion or oppression – such as conforming to cultural beauty norms, or colluding with exploitative uses of female sexuality.

For example, in our own work we have examined claims made about the potential for empowerment through participation in what has become known as 'raunch culture' (Levy, 2005). Raunch culture is part of a wider 'sexualization of culture' in which young Western women are invited to enact a more agentic and playful style of sexuality that involves appearing sexually knowledgeable and skilled, open to new experiences, and cognizant of the ways in which sexiness can confer power over men (Gill, 2003, 2007b; McNair, 2002). In our analyses of 'recreational' pole dancing (Donaghue, Kurz, & Whitehead, 2011; Whitehead & Kurz, 2009) we have examined the ways in which claims that the activity is empowering are grounded in the idea that 'getting in touch with' and 'releasing' one's 'inner sex goddess' is a sure-fire means of increasing self-confidence and becoming 'empowered'. However, we also show that alongside these claims of empowerment and authenticity is a parallel presentation of pole dancing as a light-hearted and parodic way of simply getting some exercise and 'having a laugh'. This presentation, we argue, works to provide plausible deniability against potentially derisory readings of pole dancing

as a tacky, 'slutty', or deluded attempt at being '*seriously*' sexy. Our analysis of discursive constructions of recreational pole dancing shows the tension within raunch culture discourse between 'empowerment' via authentic self-expression on the one hand and parody on the other. Furthermore, it reveals the instability and contingency of the claims to empowerment that on the surface are offered by these practices.

The power of 'choice' discourse can be seen in the ways in which even potentially shocking practices are rendered unproblematic so long as they can be understood as freely made personal choices. For example, there has recently been significant media coverage of the dramatic increase in the number of women in Western countries who are undergoing female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS), a practice that could potentially be seen as problematic both because of its extension of bodily appearance concerns into an ostensibly 'private' arena, and because of its proximity to practices such as traditional female genital cutting (Braun, 2010; see also Grabe, Chapter 25 this volume).

Braun (2009, 2010) has conducted a series of studies examining the discursive constructions of this practice, with a view to understanding how women who engage in this practice account for their choices, and how their actions are rendered as (non) problematic by others. Her approach has involved examining discourse surrounding FGCS across a wide variety of sites, including interviews with women who have undergone FGCS, examination of FGCS websites, interviews with cosmetic surgeons who perform these procedures, as well as more general references to FGCS in the media. Braun (2009) shows how the acceptability of FGCS fundamentally turns on these issues of agency and choice. Both critics and defenders of this set of practices frame their arguments in terms of the extent to which the decision to undergo this kind of procedure can be understood as a personal choice (as opposed to a response to coercive social or interpersonal pressure). Despite the vigour of the debate around FGCS,

'choice' functions as a bottom line argument that, once established, precludes any further legitimate basis for critique (Braun, 2009). The increasing number of women seeking surgical intervention to render their genitals more 'normal' is thus understood as simply another site in which women can enact their personal agency by asserting their ability and right to choose, and in doing so can secure their neoliberal identity as autonomous, freely choosing, individuals.

As well as documenting the nature of the choice, agency, and empowerment discourses that are such a feature of the ways in which feminine practices are understood and discussed, discursive approaches have also been used to directly challenge them. For example, although body hair management ('to shave or not to shave') was a contentious issue for second-wave feminists, it has largely vanished from the agenda of contemporary feminist critique. Fahs (2012) conducted a consciousness-raising intervention with students in her undergraduate women's studies class in which they abstained from their normal body hair removal practices for the 10-week duration of the class, and kept a journal in which they reflected on the experience. Many of the students reported finding themselves faced with social derogation, rejection, and hostility from their partners and families, and strong pressure to resume 'normal' grooming practices, as well as experiencing deeply felt shame and embarrassment. Fahs' analysis of these reflective journals reveals the complexity involved in choice. While decisions are constructed as ultimately residing with each person (e.g., you 'choose' to keep or remove body hair), the strength of the social consequences attached to women's body hair (non)management may serve to effectively remove that choice as a genuine option. Fahs' students were powerfully confronted with the illusion of their own 'choice' in relation to their body hair. Although technically 'free' to act as they wished in relation to it, the strength of the hostility that met these attempts to exercise the 'freedom' to act as they individually

wished in regard to their own body hair powerfully revealed the limitations of ‘personal choice’ rhetoric in the face of the apparently benign social norms that require its removal. We have also recently made a similar theoretical point ourselves in relation to discourses of ‘individual choice’ in the context of infant feeding practices (Williams, Kurz, Summers & Crabb, 2013).

Taken together, this emerging body of work on the discursive rendering of feminine bodily practices as a series of exercises in personal agency and choice shows how this form of discursive construction works to both reflect and reproduce women as neoliberal subjects who are compelled to understand themselves as freely choosing individuals, responsible, and accountable for their own fates. The evacuation of any meaningful account of their own actions in terms of ‘conformity’ or ‘pressure’ reflects the wider neoliberal ideology of contemporary Western culture in which individual freedom and autonomy are prized and structural constraints on action are made invisible (Giddens, 1991; McRobbie, 2009; Rose, 1996). This in turn promotes a ‘postfeminist’ understanding of gender (and gender relations), in which the ‘real’ historical problems of gender-based discrimination are understood as having been solved, leaving the remaining instantiations of ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ to be understood as the freely chosen personal preferences of women and men, and therefore as unsuitable and unwarranted sites of feminist criticism or intervention (McRobbie, 2009). Discursive work is uniquely placed both to examine the construction of this version of neoliberal gendered subjectivity and to reveal its cracks, showing the ways in which the ‘liberating’ discourses of ‘empowerment’, ‘agency’, and ‘choice’ are themselves centrally implicated in the contemporary ideologies of masculinity and femininity that regulate and discipline gendered bodies (for further elaboration of these arguments see Braun, 2009; Donaghue, Kurz, & Whitehead, 2011; Gill, 2006, 2007b, 2008; McRobbie, 2009; Stuart & Donaghue, 2012;

Stuart, Kurz & Ashby, 2012; Taylor, 2011; Williams, Kurz, Summers & Crabb, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

The social world is constituted in language. It is through language that we interpret the actions and experiences of ourselves and others, and from these interpretations we generate meanings and understandings of who we are, our relations with others, and our place in the social world. In this chapter we have shown how the study of language in action – of discourse – can help shed light on the ways in which gender becomes understood and is brought to bear in making intelligible the actions of individual women and men. We have also reviewed work that examines how discourses around gender are reproduced and made relevant in the interactions of everyday life. In doing this, our aim has been to demonstrate how the study of gendered discourse itself can draw attention to its socially constructed nature and to the ideologically consequential outcomes of promoting particular understandings of gender at the expense of others.

We have noted at several points throughout the chapter that most contemporary psychological approaches to gender start from a social constructionist premise in which the specific qualities, capacities, and preferences associated with gender are understood as being sociohistorically contingent, rather than as reflecting essential or ‘natural’ differences between women and men. However, whereas quantitative approaches to the study of gender focus more on measuring the effects of (socially constructed) gender (either between or within sexes), discursive approaches understand gender as a cultural accomplishment and performance. As a result, they are more concerned with analyzing the ways in which dominant discourses of gender both open up and shut down various possibilities for experience and action for women and men within the societies in which they live. Furthermore, the close examination of *how* discourses of gender work and play out in



everyday social life, and their intersections and interdependencies with other elements of the discursive matrix that shapes experience within contemporary Western societies, can reveal some of the cracks and gaps in the edifice of gender that they construct. In so doing, one can endeavor to direct attention to sites and practices in which these discourses can be resisted, disrupted, or otherwise transformed.

## NOTE

- 1 Note: (.) indicates a pause and [ ] indicates overlapping speech

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PART II

# Development





# Gender Development

Kay Bussey

## INTRODUCTION

Gender plays an important role in people's lives across the lifespan. In the early years of development, gender influences how infants are named, dressed, and treated. Later in development it influences the academic courses students select, the skills they master, and those they leave undeveloped. It further influences occupational choices, the centrality of family in daily life, and the level of financial attainment. In this chapter, the sequence of gender development is charted across the lifespan and the influence of gender on human development is considered. First, the developmental patterns of the most researched gendered social cognitive conceptions, namely, gender identity and gender stereotypes, are examined by addressing the central questions of 'How do children come to view themselves as gendered individuals?' and 'How do children develop beliefs about gender differences?' This is followed by an analysis of gender differences and similarities, addressing the question 'To what extent are behaviors, activities, attributes, and preferences patterns linked to gender?' After discussing these three central questions, the major biological and social influences on gender development are reviewed. A brief summary of the key theoretical positions

advanced to explain gender development follows and directions for future research are considered.

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCE OF GENDERED SOCIAL COGNITIVE CONCEPTIONS

Before discussing the key gendered social cognitive concepts of gender identity and gender stereotypes, a comment about the terms 'gender' and 'sex' is warranted. Although these terms are sometimes differentiated, with gender being reserved for activities and behaviors that are influenced by social factors and sex for those activities and behaviors that are influenced by biological factors (Frieze & Chrisler, 2011), here the terms are used interchangeably without any attribution about whether the underlying influence is biological or social. The reason for this is that for most gender differences both biological and social factors are involved and it is not possible to attribute the contribution of each of these sources.

### *Gender Identity*

Gender identity typically refers to a person's gendered self-characterization. It involves more



than self-categorization as male or female. Self-representational structures and self-regulatory processes contribute to the gender identity people create for themselves as do the ways they are treated on the basis of their gendered social identity (Bandura, 2008; Bussey, 2011). Although gender identity develops over the lifespan, most developmental research has focused on the early years and children's attainment of gender identity knowledge.

In Kohlberg's (1966) classic account of gender development, the role of gender identity was central. He proposed that once children understand that their gender identity remains constant across time and situations (*gender constancy*) they self-socialize themselves to behave in accord with stereotypical gender roles. Gender constancy comprises (a) the ability to label one's own and others' gender (*gender identity*), an understanding that gender remains constant over time (*gender stability*), and (b) the understanding that gender remains constant across situations regardless of the gender linkage of clothes worn and activities performed (*gender consistency*). Most children develop gender identity knowledge by the age of three and gender constancy knowledge between five and seven. Once this knowledge is attained it rarely changes.

What Kohlberg's conceptualization does not explain is the extent to which some people are more identified with their gender than others. It also gives little power to the role of gender identity in guiding gender conduct and does not account for the variation in the adoption of gender stereotypical conduct across the life course. It is thus increasingly apparent that while gender identity knowledge and its constancy are important milestones in gender development, a broader conception of gender identity is required. Consequently, in recent years we have seen the development of expanded conceptions of gender identity that include social-cognitive factors. Before considering these various approaches, the developmental antecedents of gender identity are briefly considered, as it is apparent that

children acquire considerable gender knowledge before they develop their gender identity.

### ***Pre-gender Identity Development***

Infants understand a significant amount about gender before they are able to label their own gender. During the latter half of the first year of life infants develop the ability to discriminate between male and female faces (Fagan, 1976) and between male and female voices (Miller, 1983). At about this time, intermodal gender knowledge emerges, that is, the ability to associate male and female faces with male and female voices, respectively (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, Kenyon, & Derbyshire, 1994). These discrimination abilities make it possible for pre-verbal infants to associate males and females with different behaviors.

Building on these discrimination skills, children further reveal their knowledge of gender even before they develop language skills. By 18 months, infants are able to associate some gender labels with corresponding photographs of males or females. On hearing 'man' or 'woman' girls look longer at a photograph of a man or woman, respectively; boys and girls look longer at a boy's photograph after hearing 'boy', but neither boys nor girls look longer at a girl's photograph after hearing 'girl' (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, & Derbyshire, 1998). By 24 months children are able to correctly point to photographs of adults when hearing gender labels, and between 30 and 36 months correctly do the same task with photographs of children (Leinbach & Fagot, 1986). In contrast to studies employing standard stimuli in a controlled manner, analysis of mothers' diary entries reveals that at 17 months, 25% of infants use a gender label appropriately to describe others and more than half of the sample (68%) do so by 21 months (Zosuls et al., 2009). In those studies that have separated self and other gender-label measures, children are typically able to label the gender of others before they are able to label their own gender (Thompson, 1975). Zosuls and colleagues (2009) showed that by 21 months 68% of

children had used gender labels directed toward others, but only 17% of them had used gender self-labels.

As children age, the development of gender identity broadens to its collective basis whereby children become aware that other members of their gender share certain attributes and preferences (Bauer & Coyne, 1997). This broadening appreciation of the social aspects of gender identity provides children with increased avenues for learning about gender in everyday life.

Over the life course gender identity takes on a more central role in some people's lives than in others. In the past, because most developmental research has focused on age-related changes in gender identity knowledge, there has been little focus on individual variability in gender identity development. The increasing trend of examining gender identity beyond the early years and consideration of individual variability in gender identity development points to processes not previously examined.

### ***Broader Conceptions of Identity Development***

Some of the first research to extend the conception of gender identity investigated gender identity disorders (e.g., Zucker, 1992). Here the focus was on children who identified with the other gender and adopted a cross-gender identity. Recognizing that gender identity is independent of biological sex and not necessarily dichotomous, more recent approaches have conceptualized gender identity as a continuum extending from those who identify completely with their own gender to those who identify completely with the other gender.

In one of the first examinations of variations in normative gender identity, Bem (1974) measured the extent to which individuals endorsed personality characteristics stereotypically associated with males and females, respectively. One advantage of this approach was that an individual's gender identity (or their masculinity and femininity

scores) was independent of their biological sex. Further, people could score high on both masculinity and femininity. Those who scored high on both these dimensions were classified as androgynous. Despite the many advantages of Bem's measure, it has been criticized for relying on personality traits to infer the broader concept of gender identity. Increasingly, it has been shown that people are not equally gender-typed across gender domains (e.g., personality traits, activities, and interests). Consequently, Bem's measure of gender identity has been viewed as too restrictive and it has been argued that it is more a measure of instrumentality and expressiveness than of masculinity and femininity (Spence, 1984).

Other approaches have focused on the multidimensional nature of gender identity. Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) include gender identity as one of many collective identities that may be adopted. Although this approach does not address the developmental aspects of gender identity, it posits a series of elements (e.g., self-categorization, evaluation, importance, behavioral involvement) on the basis of empirical research and theories of collective identity. Adopting a similar approach, Perry and colleagues (Egan & Perry, 2001) developed a multidimensional measure of gender identity for children and adolescents that includes five components: knowledge of own gender category, gender centrality, gender contentedness, felt pressure for gender conformity, and felt typicality to same-gender others. In this model, little variation in knowledge of one's own gender category is expected beyond the early years. For the other four components of gender identity, however, individual variation across the childhood and adolescent years has been established. For example, the more children regarded themselves as typical of their gender the more they engaged in same-gender stereotypical activities (Egan & Perry, 2001). In addition, low gender typicality, low contentedness with one's gender, and feeling pressured to conform to gender stereotypical behavior all contributed to children's psychological maladjustment (Yunger, Carver, & Perry, 2004).

From the social cognitive theory approach (Bussey, 2011; Bussey & Bandura, 1999), gender identity involves more than the ability to gender-label self and others. It is part of the broader emerging conception of the self that develops in the early years and continues to develop and change across the lifespan. Children realize that they are part of the wider collective of others who share their gender assignment. However, children also personalize their gender identity from an integration of information that they have been exposed to and experienced. Although most children develop knowledge of their gender and that of others over the first years, the influence of their gender identity on their gendered conduct varies across the life course and in different contexts depending on their goals and engagement of socio-cognitive processes linked to their gender identity. As children age, they become aware of the increasing social identities they can assume. In some circumstances, and for some children and adults, gender identity will gain prominence, and for others, ethnic or a combination of these two social identities or other identities will predominate. Both social and personal factors are expected to contribute to the prominence of these social identities. The more that social approval or sanctions are tied to gender, the more gender identity is expected to influence activities and preferences. Personal values and self-beliefs of one's competence linked to gender are also expected to increase the salience of adopting a gendered social identity.

### ***Gender Stereotypes***

Gender stereotypes are beliefs about the activities and preferences, emotions and affect, and thought patterns that are differentially associated with each gender. During the first year, infants show little awareness of gender stereotypes, but toward the end of the second year they begin to show some knowledge of them. Evidence of this stereotypic knowledge in pre-verbal children has been obtained using the preferential looking paradigm to demonstrate

infants' association of gender stereotypical objects with gender categories. After being shown visual displays of gendered objects (dolls or vehicles), infants' preferences for looking at the competing photographs of a boy or a girl that match the gender stereotype is assessed. Using this task, girls, but not boys, of 18–24 months have been shown to possess gender stereotypic knowledge (Serbin, Poulin-Dubois, Colburne, Sen, & Eichstedt, 2001). Moving beyond play objects, gender stereotypic knowledge soon expands to gender stereotypical household activities, with girls also acquiring this knowledge earlier than boys (Poulin-Dubois, Serbin, Eichstedt, Sen, & Beissel, 2002). As children's verbal skills expand, they are more able to articulate their knowledge of gender stereotypes and by three years of age most children have some awareness of gender stereotypes. This stereotypic knowledge expands over the preschool years so that by about five or six years most children have extensive gender stereotypic knowledge of children's activities and interests (Blakemore, Berenbaum, & Liben, 2009). From about five years of age onwards children begin to broaden their gender stereotypic knowledge, from concrete gender differences relating to activities and physical appearance to more abstract differences between the genders and to personality traits (Heyman & Legare, 2004). Both boys and girls also begin to attribute more positive features (e.g., nice, sweet) to girls and negative characteristics (e.g., mean, plays rough, fights) to boys (Miller, Lurye, Zosuls, & Ruble, 2009). Children's gender stereotypic knowledge continues to broaden to other domains throughout the childhood and adolescent years to include occupations, social roles, and biological characteristics.

Apart from extending their gender stereotypic knowledge as they age, children also become more flexible in their gender stereotypic conceptions. They begin to realize that there is variation in the gender stereotypicality of activities and there is variation in people's adherence to gender stereotypes (Conry-Murray & Turiel, 2012). Although sometimes

confounded in the literature, it is important to determine whether this flexibility is based on children's conceptions of the stereotype or on their belief about the acceptability of conforming or not to the stereotype.

Children tend to first develop fairly rigid gender stereotypic beliefs relating to those activities that are most highly gender-differentiated. However, as gender stereotypes are extended across domains, there is increasing variability in the strength of specific gender stereotypes. Despite this differing strength, most measures of gender stereotypic knowledge assume equivalence in terms of each of the items that assess gender stereotypicality. The gender stereotypicality of different classes of activities can vary not only within activities, but also across cultures, historical time, individuals, and age. For example, early last century pink was associated with boys as it was considered a strong color and blue was associated with girls as it was considered delicate and dainty. Over the course of the 20th century, the gender stereotyping of the colors changed to pink for girls and blue for boys (Paoletti, 1997).

There are also age, gender, and cultural differences in beliefs about adherence to gender stereotypes. Children are typically most rigid about conforming to gender stereotypic beliefs at about the time they begin school. Over the middle childhood years, they generally become more flexible before returning to greater rigidity during adolescence. Girls tend to hold more flexible gender stereotype beliefs than do boys, beginning in middle childhood (Blakemore et al., 2009). There is also evidence that there is more flexibility in gender stereotypic beliefs in some cultures than in others. Children from Taiwan, a collectivistic culture, judged boys who were depicted as gender stereotypical as more popular and likable than boys who were depicted as counter gender stereotypical. In contrast, in Israel, a more individualistic culture, non-gender and gender stereotypical boys were not judged differently (Lobel, Gruber, Govrin, & Mashraki-Pedhatzur, 2001). It is interesting to note that children from a collectivistic culture, which

stresses the importance of social norms and compliance with those norms, showed little tolerance of gender nonconformity by boys, however, this did not extend to girls. Children from both Taiwan and Israel were more accepting of girls' gender nonconformity.

It is not surprising that knowledge of gender stereotypes by themselves do not usually directly relate to engagement in gender stereotypical conduct. Most adults have attained a comprehensive knowledge of gender stereotypes, so this knowledge alone does not predict the variability in gendered conduct. A variety of factors have been offered to explain the relationship between knowledge and behavior. Many approaches emphasize the motivational factors involved in this process. One of the major factors associated with behavioral compliance with gender stereotypic knowledge are the expectations associated with gender non-conformity (Blakemore, 2003). Gender violations are often strongly sanctioned, and the more this happens, the more children anticipate negative outcomes for non-stereotypical conduct (Raag, 1999; Zosuls et al., 2011).

In addition to the influence of social outcome expectations on gendered conduct, from a social cognitive theory perspective (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), the extent to which knowledge of stereotypes influences conduct also depends on individuals' self-evaluative appraisals of their conduct. Children develop their own standards of gendered conduct synthesized from information abstracted from a number of sources, including parents, peers, and the media. Some children develop gendered standards in which they shun conduct that deviates from gender stereotypes and react with self-censure when they behave in ways that violate their gender standards. Other children develop more egalitarian standards of conduct and do not anticipate such negative self-sanctions for gender nonconformity, and may even anticipate pride for behaving in accord with egalitarian standards (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). In addition, whether or not the conduct will be enacted depends on a person's self-efficacy beliefs. When children

do not believe that they are capable of performing behaviors associated with the other gender, little effort is expended in mastering such behavior and the skills associated with mastering it are undeveloped (Britner & Pajares, 2006). While knowledge of gender stereotypes plays an important role in gendered conduct, it is apparent that other factors are involved in linking knowledge with behavior.

### **THE DEVELOPMENTAL PATTERNS OF GENDER-RELATED BEHAVIOR, ACTIVITIES, ATTRIBUTES, AND PREFERENCES**

The generally accepted notion that ‘Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus’ drawn from the title of John Gray’s (1992) popular book, emphasizes gender differences in behavioral patterns, activities, attributes, and preferences, yet the research evidence is increasingly at odds with this view. The actual differences between the genders in many domains, including verbal and mathematics ability, are small and some have been diminishing over the past few decades (Hyde, 2005, 2007). In a few domains of psychological functioning, such as motor behaviors (e.g., throwing distance), some aspects of sexuality, and physical aggression, gender differences persist (Hyde, 2005) and may even be increasing in the technological domain for both leisure (e.g., computer games) and occupational purposes (e.g., computer science and engineering; Jenson & de Castell, 2010). The media, too, continues to differentially depict males and females, with a greater focus on aggression in males and on the appearance of females (Dill & Thill, 2007).

Overall, however, findings from meta-analyses demonstrate minimal gender differences in many domains of psychological, functioning including cognitive abilities (e.g., mathematics), social and personality variables (e.g., leadership), communication abilities, and moral reasoning, thereby leading Hyde (2005) to advance ‘the gender similarities hypothesis’.

This hypothesis states that, contrary to popular views, men and women, boys and girls are more similar than they are different in most areas of psychological functioning. However, despite the research findings, the media and marketers continue to exaggerate and promote gender stereotypes. Before turning to an examination of some of the evidence relating to gender similarities and differences in activities, attributes, and preferences, the developmental basis of these similarities and differences are examined.

### ***Developmental Patterns of Gender Differences***

Infants do not show any preferences for toys and activities typically associated with their gender. However, during the second year, gender differences in stereotypical play preferences emerge (Blakemore et al., 2003). Although the age when this occurs varies across studies, depending on the methods used and the stereotypical objects available for selection, from about 18 months both boys and girls look more at same- than other-gender stereotypical objects (Serbin et al., 2001). By about 2 years most girls prefer to play with stereotypical female play objects (e.g., dolls, home-maker toys) and most boys prefer to play with stereotypical male objects (e.g., cars, toy guns) (Servin, Bohlin, & Berlin, 1999).

Children’s gender stereotypical activity preferences tend to remain stable over the early years. Those children whose play and activity preferences were more gender stereotypical at two-and-a half years were also the most gender stereotypical at five years of age (Golombok & Rust, 2008). Further, boys exhibit behavior patterns consistent with gender stereotypes at an earlier age than do girls (Servin et al., 1999), even though their gender stereotypic knowledge lags behind girls’ knowledge. As children age, these early gender stereotypical activity preferences are expanded to other domains including academic pursuits, occupational choice, and interactional patterns. Along with this broadening of gender differences to other domains of psychological



functioning there is also an increasing trend for the diminution of many gender differences and an increasing overlap in the performances of boys and girls, and of men and women. This is illustrated next in a selection of domains that are stereotypically gender-differentiated.

### ***Gender Differences and Similarities in Selected Activities, Attributes, and Preferences***

Historically, women have been associated with the home-maker role and men with the breadwinner role. Therefore, education has been regarded as more important for men than for women. Although women were not afforded the same educational opportunities as men, their lack of representation in many occupational spheres was attributed to their lack of ability rather than to a lack of opportunity. At the beginning of the 20th century few women in Western societies received a tertiary education, but by the beginning of the 21st century women undergraduates outnumbered men (National Science Foundation, 2007). This rapid increase in the education of girls and women over the past century has given rise to an increase in the participation of women in the workforce.

### ***Academic Achievement and Occupational Choices***

Despite these educational changes, there are vast differences in the academic achievement and occupational choices of men and women. For example, women remain underrepresented in the math and science fields in both educational and workplace settings (Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009). To understand this underrepresentation of women in stereotypical male domains it is instructive to examine the developmental antecedents of boys' and girls' performances in these domains.

Despite minimal performance differences in the competencies of boys and girls during the school years, children continue to develop gender stereotypic beliefs about academic capability. These beliefs are largely fueled by

the social influences of parents, peers, teachers, and the media so that children develop beliefs about their own competencies not only from their performance accomplishments but also from the beliefs and expectations of others. Consequently, over the middle childhood years, despite girls' high achievement in math and science they begin to believe that boys are better at math and science and their self-efficacy beliefs in these domains begins to decline. This subsequently affects students' achievement in these domains as they spend less time mastering the associated skills, do not persevere when difficulties are encountered, and attribute their poor performances to lack of ability rather than to lack of effort (Britner & Pajares, 2006).

The lower self-efficacy beliefs of women for math and science affect their choices in tertiary education so that fewer women select math and science majors (Bussey, 2011; Hackett & Betz, 1989). Consequently, women are less likely than men to enter STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) careers. Men, on the other hand, are less likely to enter the caring and nurturing professions such as nursing and teaching than are women. However, the reasons for eschewing stereotype-inconsistent occupations differ by gender. For example, men avoid female stereotypical occupations because of their low status and lower monetary incentives rather than from lacking a belief in their ability to perform the occupational activities (Watt, 2010).

### ***Aggression***

Males are often regarded as the aggressive gender, but gender differences depend on which aspect of aggression is measured. Research confirms that boys engage in more physical and verbal aggression and bullying than do girls (Archer, 2004). For more indirect forms of aggression, such as relational aggression which impacts relationships through spreading rumors, excluding peers, and telling lies, gender differences are minimal and, if found, usually favor girls (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008). Further, girls engage



in this form of aggression more than they engage in physical and verbal aggression. The advent of the electronic era has witnessed the introduction of a new form of aggression and bullying among peers, cyber aggression. The emerging research shows that girls are as involved in this form of aggression as boys (Hemphill et al., 2012).

It thus seems that when aggression is less physical in nature and does not involve face-to-face confrontation, girls engage in it as much as boys. Even for aggression in an interactive video game that involved dropping bombs, women performed as aggressively as men when they could remain anonymous (Lightdale & Prentice, 1994). Although it has sometimes been argued that gender differences in aggression are attributable to biological differences between the genders, such as different testosterone and activity levels, this explanation holds little value for the more indirect forms of aggression. Recent research has shown that a vast array of social (e.g., acceptance from the peer group) and cognitive influences (outcome expectations for aggressive conduct, hostile attribution bias) also contribute to aggressive behavior (Card, 2011).

### *Prosocialness and Empathy*

In general, females are stereotyped as more prosocial and empathic than males. The range of behaviors that qualify as prosocial is quite broad and includes helping, caring, nurturing, rescuing those in danger, and so on. However, the evidence shows that no general conclusion regarding gender differences can be drawn. In some situations men are more prosocial than women and in others there is either no difference between the genders or women are more prosocial than men. Eagly and Crowley's (1986) meta-analysis revealed that men were more helpful in risky situations that occurred in the presence of others. In contrast, women's helpfulness was associated with nurturing and caring for others that typically occurred in private.

It is often believed that women and girls' greater concern for others is related to their

higher capacity for empathy. However, women are not always the most empathic gender. For more unobtrusive measures of empathy such as physiological or facial expressions and gestures, there are small to non-existent gender differences compared with larger gender differences for self-report and other measures where it is explicit that empathy is being measured (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Thus, if the gender stereotypicality of the measure is obscured, the likelihood of obtaining gender differences on the measure is reduced.

It is apparent from the evidence reviewed above that overinflated claims of gender differences contribute to the maintenance of gender stereotypic beliefs. This results in many people not developing skills and competencies in certain domains because of their gender. For example, based on stereotypical conceptions, men are less likely to become involved in nurturing activities such as childcare and women shy away from scientific careers that involve mathematics. This underdevelopment of skills and competencies based on gender means that many people do not fully develop their capabilities, which remain dormant as a potentiality.

## **INFLUENCES ON GENDER DEVELOPMENT**

Although the gender development literature acknowledges the contribution of both social and biological influences, most research continues to examine one or the other. This chapter follows that lead but notes along with others (Berenbaum, Blakemore, & Beltz, 2011) that future research may profit from focusing more on the interaction between these influences.

### ***Biological Influences***

Although there are significant biological differences between the genders, biological sex is not always neatly dimorphic. Males and females are differentiated genetically at conception, with females possessing two

X chromosomes and males possessing an X and a Y chromosome. Apart from this differentiation, male and female fetuses start out the same and it is only 6–8 weeks post gestation that the testes develop and the genitalia of the female and male fetuses begin to differentiate with the production of testosterone. Hormones play a crucial role in fetal gender differentiation. When the supply of hormones to the fetus is problematic, the genitalia of the fetus may not match their genes. In other conditions there are enzyme deficiencies so that at birth the genitalia appear ambiguous or female-like, but at puberty sufficient androgen is produced to masculinize the genitals, hair growth, and muscles. In some cases, the adolescent continues to live as a girl and in other cases adopts the identity of a boy (Schober, Carmichael, Hines, & Ransley, 2002).

Although hormones can affect the infant's developing genitalia, the evidence for the effects of hormones on psychological development is more difficult to obtain. One reason for this difficulty is that, as shown in the previous section, gender differences in many areas of psychological functioning are small. It is also impossible ethically to experimentally manipulate the various biological markers that differentiate the two genders to establish their causal effect on human performance. Consequently, most of the research in this area relies on children who have impaired hormonal development either from normal variability or resulting from some form of misadventure.

One area where there is most evidence for the influence of prenatal hormones on gender differences is in play behavior, an area where there are some of the largest gender differences. Female infants with congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), a genetic disorder where high levels of androgens are produced by the adrenal gland prenatally, develop partially masculinized genitals which are typically feminized after birth through intervention and they are brought up as girls, while male infants with CAH develop genitals typical of other boys. Although CAH girls engage in

more male stereotypical activities than do non-CAH girls, they do not engage in these activities to the same extent as boys (Hines, 2004). It is impossible to conclude from such studies how much hormones influence gendered behavior because of the confounding influences associated with factors that led to and are associated with the atypical biological development of these children (e.g., parents' awareness of the condition may impact their gendered parenting practices). Therefore, how hormones affect behavior and whether it is a direct link or is linked via socialization factors remains to be determined. It is still not possible to answer the question, 'How does biology make boys prefer cars?' (Servin et al., 1999, p. 48).

Other biological differences that play a major role in gender development are the physical strength of males and the childbearing capability of females. In Wood and Eagly's (2002) biosocial theory of gender differences, it is proposed that these physical gender differences along with societal structures give rise to the gendered division of labor. However, in the technological era, these physical gender differences exert far less influence on the adoption of traditional gender roles than they once did. Biology is no longer destiny. In previous generations, many more occupations were reliant on physical strength than is the case in the electronic era. Although most women bear their own children, some women now choose surrogates to bear them and it is even possible to develop embryos in test tubes. Through the use of contraception women are able to choose when and if they have children.

These changes have been accompanied by expanded choices for men. Greater societal acceptance of the nurturing role of fathers and the availability of paternity leave in many developed countries has enabled fathers to spend more time interacting with their infants. Further, research has demonstrated that when men interact with their infants more than their partners they show a reduction in testosterone levels and an increase in hormonal levels such as cortisol which is associated

with caregiving (Storey, Noseworthy, Delahunty, Halfyard, & McKay, 2011). Similarly, when men are more involved with childcare and in societies that foster nurturance in men, testosterone and aggression levels are reduced (Alvergne, Faurie, & Raymond, 2009). This bidirectional link between hormones and behavior calls into question the causative role ascribed to hormones for gender differences in behaviors such as aggression and nurturance (Gettler, McDade, Agustin, & Kuzawa, 2011).

### **Social Influences**

The main way in which social influences impact on gender development is through enactive experience, direct instruction, and modeling (Bussey, 2011; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). *Enactive experience* refers to evaluative reactions to gendered performances. *Direct instructions* inform others of expected gender-linked behavior. The third major form of social influence is *modeling*. Each of these modes of influence is used by agents of social influence, including parents, peers, and the media.

### **Parental Influences**

Although there has been some debate about the extent of parents' influence on their children's gender development (Lytton & Romney, 1991), it has been shown that parents do influence their children's gender development markedly in many domains (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Leaper, 2002). Even before an infant is born, parents think about their newborn in gendered terms. Names, color of clothing and blankets, types of objects, and decoration of the infant's bedroom typically reflect the infant's gender. The way that parents and others respond to an infant also depends on its gender. Parents shown a videotape of an infant displaying a moderate amount of arousal interpreted the infant's ambiguous emotional display as *fear* when told the infant was a girl, and *anger* when told the infant was a boy (Condry & Condry, 1976). So, before the infant has any

chance to develop its own preferences, parents structure their child's physical environment, interact with the child, and provide toys based on gender (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990).

Many parents raise their children along gender stereotypical lines, guiding conformity to gender stereotypes and being pleased when children do conform. Boys are encouraged to participate in activities focused outside the house involving manipulating toys and building blocks that foster visual/spatial skills, whereas girls are directed towards objects that promote skills associated with keeping house and caring for others (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Parents also typically interact differently with their sons than with their daughters. They tend to converse more about technical and science-related issues with their sons, and engage in more emotional discussions with their daughters (Leaper, 2002). The fostering of these different potentials in boys and girls has profound implications for the way that children begin to see themselves. Development of particular skills and self-beliefs about competencies to master those skills is particularly important for the selection of courses at school, at university, and for the later selection of occupations. Fredricks and Eccles (2002) showed that parents' stereotypical gender expectations impacted their sons' and daughters' performance and self-beliefs in their competence in mathematics and sport. Apart from directing and positively evaluating gender relevant conduct in their children, parents also model it (Serbin, Poulin-Dubois, & Eichstedt, 2002). Even children of 24 months showed evidence of learning about the gender-linkage of household tasks from observing the tasks performed by their parents.

Although many parents raise their children to conform to gender stereotypes, not all do. When parents adopt more gender-egalitarian practices with their children, daughters perform better academically than daughters of gender-traditional parents (Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 1996). Mothers also influence the career choices of their daughters.

Girls who selected STEM subjects at school and went on to occupations in these fields reported that their mothers' modeling of technological-related activities was pivotal in their developing an interest in these fields and believing that they could successfully perform in them (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). Although some research shows that maternal employment and non-gender stereotypical roles in the family can promote the adoption of less gender stereotypical occupational preferences, attitudes, and behaviors (McHale et al., 2003), this influence is not confirmed in all studies (Weisner, Garnier, & Lucky, 1994). It is one thing to influence children's gender stereotypical conduct and quite another to influence their non-gender stereotypical conduct. Parental influence may lose its impact when parents espouse countervailing views that are at odds with the general society, children's immediate peer group, and the models they view on television and other media.

### **Peer Influences**

As children age, peers assume an increasingly important role in influencing their gender development. Peers use the same means of influence as those used by parents. Typically they guide children's activities in gender stereotypical directions, praise them for gender stereotypical conformity, censure them for gender stereotypical non-conformity, and model gender stereotypical patterns of behavior (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

From a young age, children sanction each other for gender stereotype violations and encourage each other for gender stereotypical conduct. This sanctioning and encouragement starts in the early years and continues throughout childhood and adolescence and leads to increased adherence to gender stereotypical behavior. Young children are more direct than older children in their sanctioning of peers who violate gender norms, whereas older children and adolescents tend to use more indirect methods of sanctioning gender non-conforming peers. Sanctions including ridicule, harassment, and exclusion are used to influence peers'

gender conformity (Young & Sweeting, 2004). Boys who were victimized by peers reduced their female stereotypical behavior over the course of a school year (Ewing Lee & Troop-Gordon, 2011) and children who anticipated receiving negative sanctions for their gender non-conformity showed lower levels of adjustment than those children not anticipating such censure (Carver, Yunger, & Perry, 2003).

Peer models also serve as a strong influence on children's gender development. In many situations, children are more prone to emulate a same- than other-gender peer model (Bussey & Perry, 1982). Although adults' modeling of occupational and domestic activities carries considerable weight for children and adolescents, peers are more significant role models for play activities, appearance, and dress. The influence of peers on gender development is further enhanced by children's social interactions with same-gender peers. Gender segregation begins in the early years and increases during middle childhood. Despite the vast amount that has been written about peer group gender segregation, there is still debate about why it occurs. One of the most widely proffered explanations is based on the similarity of behavioral interactions among children of the same gender, especially the higher activity level and rough and tumble play enacted by boys' compared with girls' groups (Maccoby, 1998; Mehta & Strough, 2009). However, evidence for this position is mixed (Fabes, Martin, & Hanish, 2003).

Extending the idea of perceived behavioral similarity with same-gender peers to cognitive factors, Martin, Fabes, Hanish, Leonard, and Dinella (2011) investigated the contribution of cognitive-behavioral similarity to gendered peer segregation. High cognitive similarity was associated with more time spent interacting with same-gender peers but behavioral similarity was only predictive of greater interaction with same gender peers for boys. This study, however, like many, cannot disentangle whether children who are more similar either in their behavior or in the beliefs with same gender peers select to interact more with their same gender peers or

if interaction with same gender peers leads to greater similarity to these peers.

Another line of research shows that gender segregation may be more influenced by gender stereotypical violations. Boys and girls anticipated approval for joining same-gender peer groups, but censure for joining other-gender peer groups (Zosuls et al., 2011). However, when there is less peer group surveillance and the possibility of evaluative appraisal is reduced, boys and girls engage in more joint play activities (Bannerjee & Lintern, 2000). It is likely that children's anticipation of disapproval for joining other-gender groups contributes to gender segregation and the choice of traditional gender activities that may promote behavioral similarity between the genders rather than being the cause of it as initially proposed. This view is consistent with findings showing that the more time children and adolescents spend interacting in same-gender groups, the more gender stereotypical their behavior, personality traits, and interests (Martin & Fabes, 2001; McHale, Kim, Dotterer, Crouter, & Booth, 2009).

Whatever the reasons for gender segregation, it has been argued that male and female peer groups function so differently that this is akin to two gender cultures (Maccoby, 1998). Despite the gender-differentiated behaviors of gender segregated peer groups, other research shows that there is more variation within male and female groups and more overlap between them than suggested by the two cultures model (Underwood, 2004; Zarbatany, McDougall, & Hymel, 2000).

Not all peers are united in their intolerance of gender non-conformity. It is increasingly apparent that within peer groups there are variations in the beliefs and attitudes of peer group members. For example, girls who develop interests in stereotypical male domains such as mathematics and science, establish groups with other girls who have the same interests (Zeldin & Pajares, 2000). It is noteworthy that girls who develop interests in these stereotypical male achievement domains do not join boys' groups, which

might be expected if behavioral similarity were the only factor guiding their selection of peers. Girls who do not conform to gender roles may expect as much censure from gender-conforming girls as they do from boys. Hence, those who challenge gender roles may be as selective in their choice of same gender peers as they are in their avoidance of other gender peers. This may be one of the reasons why gender-segregated schools have not shown achievement advantages for girls (Halpern et al., 2011).

### **Media Influences**

The media plays an influential role in gender development. For centuries, the print media has presented gender stereotypical content, and from the 1950s television has played an increasing role in presenting such content. In the present century, music videos, computer games, the Internet, and many other forms of social media all serve to affirm gender stereotypes.

Despite the dilution of gender differences alluded to earlier in this chapter, television depictions of men and women remain gender stereotypical. Men continue to be portrayed as authoritative, powerful, and muscular. In contrast, women are most often depicted in low status roles that focus on their appearance with provocative sexual implications (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). These differential portrayals of men and women are common in television advertising and programming across most Western countries and in those African and Asian countries where data are available (Furnham & Chan, 2003). For example, in South Africa, as in most countries, women are underrepresented in television advertisements. Men are depicted as authoritative narrators engaged in public sphere activities whereas women are typically portrayed in domestic roles (Luyt, 2011). Soap operas make up the bulk of the Spanish-language television programming in the USA and although there is equal representation of men and women in these programs,



gender stereotypes abound. For men, occupations are central, whereas for women physical appearance is highlighted and they are cast in domestic and nurturing roles (Rivadeneyra, 2011).

The print media, particularly magazines that are oriented towards teenage girls, provide little information about women achieving high status occupations or managing the balance between family and work. Rather, the focus of these magazines is on appearance, body image, and relationships. Boys' magazines cover topics related to hobbies, occupations, and entertainment, directing their focus away from issues related to the home and relationships (Malkin, Wornian, & Chrisler, 1999). Status differences between the genders are exaggerated even more in music videos and in computer games. Many computer games are violent and present women in sexually degrading ways (Dill & Thill, 2007).

Although children and teenagers of this generation spend less time watching television compared to previous generations, more time is spent with other media forms such as computer games and the Internet. Boys spend more time than girls playing video games and watching programs that feature sports, cartoons, and action-adventures. Girls spend more time watching comedy programs and those that focus on interpersonal relationships, as exemplified in the classic *Sex in the City* which portrays the daily lives of young women living in New York.

The effects of these media portrayals are not fleeting. The more time children spend watching television, the more gender stereotypical are their beliefs (Durkin & Nugent, 1998). Although it is often hard to determine if television is influencing children's stereotypical views or if heavy television viewers started out with stronger gender stereotypical beliefs, a study conducted in Canada that measured children's gender stereotypical beliefs before and after television was introduced showed that two years after the introduction of television, children's gender stereotypical beliefs increased (Kimball, 1986).

## THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS OF GENDER DEVELOPMENT

Several theories have been proposed to explain gender development. Most draw on some aspects of the biological, cognitive, and social influences reviewed in the preceding sections. The theories vary in the emphasis they assign to each of these influences and the age span they cover.

### *Biological Approaches*

Evolutionary psychology draws on distal factors from human ancestry to explain biologically based gender differences (see Byrd-Craven & Geary, Chapter 7 this volume). Basically, it is argued that reproductive differences between the genders lead to gender asymmetry in parenting, with women devoting more time to rearing their offspring than men. This greater investment by women had the effect of women being more selective than men about their mate selection, thereby contributing to men's evolved dispositions for aggression and competition as they vie for an attractive mate to secure their lineage. From this perspective, gender-differentiated behavior in contemporary society is seen as a vestige of ancient history embedded in the genes of contemporary men and women. Although there is much research supporting this viewpoint, there is also criticism of tying contemporary gender differences back to ancestral origins with little consideration of the societies in which men and women now live. Extensive discourse on this approach is available elsewhere (see Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Morton, Chapter 23 this volume) and is not reproduced here.

Not all biologically oriented theories are so tied to the past. As noted in the biological influences section, there has been much research examining the more proximal link of genes and hormones on gender-differentiated behavior. It is apparent from this research that evidence to explain the variability in gendered conduct within and across genders is limited. Although there is some linkage between



hormone levels that are in the normal range and gender conduct in the infant and childhood years, the link is not strong (Auyeung et al., 2009). Researchers believe that there is more promise in finding this link during puberty, when sex hormones increase. It will be interesting to see if in the coming years the use of more sophisticated technologies for measuring biological markers in conjunction with social influences will more adequately explain the variability in gendered behavior.

### ***Cognitive Approaches***

Cognitive developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1966) and gender schema theory (Martin & Halverson, 1981) are similar in that they focus on the early years of development, place a strong emphasis on the cognitive influences on gender development, and both have been described as self-socialization theories (Zosuls et al., 2009). Cognitive developmental theory casts gender constancy as the major psychological construct to account for gender development. It postulates that once children are able to label their own and others' gender and understand that their gender remains constant over time and across situations, they are motivated to behave in accord with gender stereotypes which enhances their self-esteem. In recent years, there have been various tests of this theory mainly to explain why children engage in gender stereotypical behavior before they have attained gender constancy (usually attained between five and seven years of age). The research has focused on the adequacy of gender constancy measures and whether full gender constancy is necessary for children to self-socialize themselves along gendered lines. Although some dispute remains about the emergence of gendered behavior relative to gender constancy, as shown earlier, many children engage in gender stereotypical behavior long before they have achieved gender constancy. Gender schema theory, on the other hand, only requires that children are able to accurately label their own and others' gender for gendered self-socialization to begin. Whatever level of

gender conception is necessary for self-socialization, the main thrust of these approaches is that gender cognitions guide behavior in line with gender stereotypical behavior.

There is no doubt that gendered self-conceptions are of importance in gender development. However, these theories pay little attention to a more interactive approach whereby gendered conduct, gendered experiences, and gendered self-conceptions influence each other bi-directionally. In terms of explaining the variability within genders and the overlap between the genders in gendered behavior, gender constancy and gender identity knowledge offer little explanatory value as there is little variability in children's understanding of these gendered concepts past the age of six or seven years.

### ***Social Approaches***

Other theories have accorded more emphasis to the social environment than is mostly the case with biologically based theories. These approaches typically focus on the social construction of gender differences and are better able to account for the variability in gendered conduct in different social contexts. Societal structures that support different social roles for men and women give rise to gender differences in behavior and in social interaction (West & Zimmerman, 1987). These approaches emphasize the variability rather than the universality of gender conduct.

Other theories whose major aim is to examine the impact of social influences on gender development have focused on the group rather than the individual. This line of research has been mainly informed by social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) theories. Social identity theory focuses on intergroup relations and the biasing processes that contribute to differentiating the ingroup from the outgroup and promoting similarity within groups. The accentuation of similarity and difference are applied to the self in the self-categorization

approach. Here, the individual differentiates the self from outgroup members and heightens similarity with other ingroup members. This approach has been applied to various social identities including race, ethnicity, national identity, and gender. From this perspective, social identity is flexible and different aspects of one's identity are more relevant in some contexts than in others. Grace, David, and Ryan (2008) showed that children emulated a model of the same gender or the same age depending on which social category had been made salient.

### ***Multi-perspective Approaches***

The biosocial theory of gender differences (Wood & Eagly, 2002) draws on both biological and social constructive theoretical approaches. Similar to the social constructive perspectives, it is argued that gender differences mainly emerge in preparation for the different social roles of the two genders. In most of the social constructivist positions the gendered division of labor has its roots in some form of patriarchy, whereas the biosocial approach acknowledges biological influences, particularly the greater strength of men and the childbearing capabilities of women. These physical differences between men and women in conjunction with social factors are expected to lead to the different roles of men and women because they are more efficiently performed by one gender than the other. This theory is more able to accommodate contextual variation across cultures than most biological theories, but pays little attention to individual variability in the adoption of gender roles.

From a social cognitive theory perspective, a wide range of personal and social factors influence gender conduct (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). These factors include the social influences of parents, peers, and the media as well as the impact of educational and occupational systems. The impact of these influences is expected to become more variable across the lifespan as there is increasing variation in individual's exposure to social influences.

Further variation is expected over the course of development as individuals self-regulate their gender conduct. From this perspective, individuals are not viewed as automatons whose behavior is directly shaped by biological or social influences. Rather, as children mature and their cognitive processes develop, they become more able to weigh up and synthesize information derived from their various experiences. They personalize these social experiences and from them develop outcome expectations, standards of self-evaluation, and self-efficacy beliefs associated with gender stereotypes and their gender identity and thereby regulate their gender conduct. This means that the same social influences can lead to the adoption of different types of gender conduct depending on the self-regulation processes that are invoked in varying situations.

In short, the specific expression of gendered conduct will vary across situations depending on the interplay of situational and personal factors. In the model of triadic reciprocal causation, gendered behavior, personal and environmental factors influence each other bi-directionally (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Environmental influences do not simply direct gendered patterns of behavior. Rather, individuals self-regulate their behavior depending on the situation and they also select and create environments rather than simply accepting the imposed environment. For example, as discussed earlier, girls join groups of other girls who are accepting of girls' achievement in mathematics. In sum, this approach acknowledges the influence of biological and social factors as determinants of gender conduct, but assigns a major role to the individual's agency in terms of the construction of sociocognitive processes that serve as motivators of gendered conduct.

### **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This chapter has shown that the field of gender development is a vibrant area of research that encompasses biological, social, and cognitive

factors associated with gender across the lifespan. However, there is a need for more longitudinal research in order to provide a better understanding of the causal connections among the variables rather than their association with each other. After all the research and debate about infants' early gender development there is still little research on this important issue using multiple measures across the years. There is also too little research from developing countries where gender equity has not been achieved to the extent it has been in most developed countries. Charting gender development as these societies change and social policies pertaining to gender are implemented will provide invaluable information about the gender development process.

A further theme to emerge from this chapter is that psychological differences between the genders have been overinflated. In many areas of psychological functioning, meta-analyses reveal that large differences between the genders are rare and where gender differences do occur they are in specific contexts rather than across the board. Take the case of widely held views about gender differences in aggression. Meta-analyses reveal that although males are more physically aggressive than females, this gender difference in aggression is not obtained in the interpersonal domain of relational aggression involving spreading rumors and social exclusion. An important limitation of the existing research is the focus on main effects. It is becoming evident that gender differences are apparent in some contexts and not in others, at some points of the lifespan and not others, and for some people but not others. To understand these moderating effects with gender, it is increasingly important to include multiple measures in studies and to examine how they interact with each other. To investigate these important and complex questions, it is not only important to use sophisticated methodologies but also to firmly base the research in theory. Theoretical models of gender development need to broaden their perspectives to examine how biological, cognitive, and behavioral

factors interact and influence each other bidirectionally rather than focusing on each of these factors separately. This would not only contribute to empirical findings on gender development but would strengthen the theoretical underpinnings of the field.

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# An Evolutionary Understanding of Sex Differences

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The differences between girls and boys, and men and women have long been topics of interest and speculation by both the lay public and the scientific community. Although psychologists have systematically studied these differences for over 100 years (see Ellis et al., 2008), they have only recently begun to seriously consider how these sex differences reflect our evolutionary history. In this chapter, we focus on how knowledge of human evolution enlightens our understanding of and allows for testable predictions about sex differences, and how they are expressed in various social and cultural contexts (Geary, 2010). This perspective not only informs us about the traits and behaviors on which we can expect the sexes to differ, but those on which we can expect the sexes to be similar. The power of the evolutionary approach is that it identifies ultimate mechanisms that produce similarities between the sexes (natural selection) as well as those that produce differences (sexual selection). An evolutionary perspective also highlights the critical importance of within-sex variation, because without mechanisms that produce this variation there is no evolution (Darwin, 1859).

Discussion of these mechanisms is beyond the scope of this chapter, but at an ultimate level includes trade-offs in the costs and benefits of trait expression (e.g., high testosterone concentrations enhance competitiveness but with risk of a compromised immune system) and, at a proximate level, variation in prenatal and postnatal concentrations of sex hormones (for a review, Geary, 2010).

We begin with Darwin's (1871) theory of sexual selection, that is, the reproductive dynamics that result in the evolution of sex differences in all sexually reproducing species. We then illustrate a few sex-typed behaviors in other species and how these follow logically from the basic mechanisms of sexual selection. In the third section we provide examples of human sex differences in intra-sexual competition for mates and in parental investment, and then tie these to the developmental emergence of corresponding sex differences during childhood.

## SEXUAL SELECTION

Darwin's (1871) sexual selection refers to the mechanisms responsible for the evolution

and expression of sex differences and which involves competing with members of the same sex over mates (intrasexual competition) and discriminating among mating partners (intersexual choice). It is a dynamic process influenced by multiple factors, including, but not limited to, sex differences in the relative costs and benefits of reproduction (Trivers, 1972) and the constraints of the social context in which the individual is situated (Emlen & Oring, 1977). These dynamics are most commonly expressed as male–male competition over access to mates and female choice of mating partners, although in species in which males parent, including humans, there is also female–female competition and male choice (Geary, 2000). The most common result is the elaboration of traits used to facilitate competition over mates and that influence choice of mating partner. Human sex differences in physical size and upper body strength are examples that influence both female choice and male–male competition in traditional societies (Geary, 2010).

### ***How Did Competition and Choice Evolve?***

Sex differences in the tendency to compete and to be choosy can be traced, in part, to sex differences in parental investment (Trivers, 1972). Parental investment is any cost (e.g., time and/or energy) associated with raising offspring that reduces the individual's ability to produce or invest in other offspring. The sex that provides more than his or her share of parental investment is an important reproductive resource for members of the opposite sex. The result is competition among members of the lower investing sex (typically males) over the parental investment of members of the higher investing sex (typically females). Members of the higher-investing sex are thus in demand and as a result can be choosy when it comes to mates.

Sex differences in parental investment in turn reflect a more basic difference in the

potential rate of reproduction (Clutton-Brock & Vincent, 1991). The sex with the higher potential reproductive rate tends to invest more in competing for mates than in parenting, and the sex with the lower rate tends to invest more in parenting than in competing. This pattern emerges because members of the sex with the higher potential rate can rejoin the mating pool more quickly than can members of the opposite sex. Individuals of the lower-investing sex typically have more offspring if they compete for mates than if they parent, whereas members of the higher-investing sex benefit more from being choosy than do members of the lower-investing sex. For mammals, internal gestation and obligatory postpartum female care create a large sex difference in the potential rate of reproduction (Clutton-Brock, 1991): males can benefit from seeking and obtaining additional mates, whereas females cannot. The sex difference in reproductive rate, combined with offspring that can be effectively raised by the female, creates the potential for large female–male differences in the mix of parenting and competing. This difference is realized in 95–97% of mammalian species (Clutton-Brock, 1989).

Although these patterns are most evident in mammals, they are also found in many species of birds, fish, and reptiles (Andersson, 1994). Critically, the predicted reversal of sex differences is found for species in which females have a faster rate of reproduction, as in species in which males incubate eggs. Females in these polyandrous species have the potential to reproduce in each breeding season with more than one mate, and are typically larger, more colorful, and more pugnacious than males, whereas males tend to be choosy (e.g., Reynolds & Székely, 1997).

### ***What About Context?***

The expression of sex differences in parenting, competing, and mate choice will be influenced by prenatal and postnatal exposure to sex

hormones (Adkins-Reagan, 2005), as well as by social context. A critical contextual feature is the operational sex ratio (OSR), the ratio of sexually active males to sexually active females in a given breeding population at a given point in time, which is related to the rate of reproduction (Emlen & Oring, 1977). A sex ratio of 1:1 represents a population in which there are as many sexually *mature* females as males, but any sex difference in the rate of reproduction will skew the OSR. Because mammalian males have a faster potential reproductive rate than mammalian females, there are typically many more sexually *receptive* males than sexually *receptive* females in most populations. This is because, once pregnant, females leave the mating pool. The resulting bias in the OSR creates the conditions that lead to intense male–male competition over access to a smaller number of sexually receptive females. It is true that human females often remain sexually active during pregnancy and lactation (see Geary, 2000), but the critical feature in these dynamics is whether they are able to conceive additional offspring. Male–male competition, in turn, creates the conditions that favor female choosiness.

The OSR is influenced by other factors as well, including sex differences in the time of arrival at breeding sites and the degree of synchrony in female sexual receptivity (Emlen & Oring, 1977), which can result in changes in mating dynamics within the species and at different points in the same breeding season (Grant & Foam, 2002). In some situations, the sex with the higher potential rate of reproduction is better off by investing in parenting than in competing for mates. For instance, social monogamy and high levels of male parenting are common in *canids* (e.g., coyotes, *Canis latrans*), who tend to have large litters (Asa & Valdespino, 1998). Large litter sizes, prolonged offspring dependency, and the ability of the male to provide food during this dependency result in *canid* males being able to sire more offspring with a monogamous, high-parenting reproductive strategy than with a polygynous high-competition reproductive strategy.

## Overview of Sex-typed Behavior

Sexual selection will necessarily result in sex-typed behaviors, that is, behaviors that are more common in one sex than the other. These differences have been documented in hundreds of species (Andersson, 1994), and it is almost certain that none of them have a conscious, explicit awareness of the function of these behaviors and certainly no awareness of gender as it is understood by our species. Sexual selection explains how and why these sex differences have evolved. However, this is not simply a descriptive theory, as it has been successfully used to predict not only sex differences, but also associated reproductive dynamics. As an example, knowing that males are physically larger than females in a given species, with no other information, allows one to make strong inferences about the reproductive dynamics of the species: specifically, that males are polygynous, physically compete for access to mates, and in comparison to females have a longer developmental period, provide less (often no) parental care, and have a shorter lifespan (Allman, Rosin, Kumar, & Hasenstaub, 1998; Plavcan & van Schaik, 1997).

Prenatal and postnatal exposure to sex hormones, androgens (e.g., testosterone) and estrogens, explain how these evolved differences are expressed in the ‘here-and-now’ or proximate expression of these traits (Fitch & Denenberg, 1998), and how trait expression unfolds over the lifespan (Finch & Rose, 1995). These hormones have been shown to influence sex differences in cognition and behavioral biases through organization and later sensitivity of associated brain areas prenatally, and through activation of these areas with postnatal exposure to hormones. These influences are complex, however, and at times very subtle (see McCarthy & Arnold, 2011). Generally, prenatal exposure to sex hormones has significant, epigenetic influences on which genes are expressed and which are not (McCarthy et al., 2009). Early experiences and later social environments can also result in epigenetic changes in gene expression

(McCarthy & Arnold, 2011). This implies that although sex hormones modify brain systems and subsequent cognition and behavior, they do not create completely different systems and do not preclude environmental influences on these systems. Nonetheless, exposure to sex hormones cannot be denied as a potent influence on the expression of sex differences and critical proximate mechanisms associated with sexual selection.

Prenatal and early postnatal exposure to sex hormones can influence early behavioral biases that in turn create a feedback loop with the social context and ecology in which the individuals are situated, which in turn can result in further sex differences (Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002; Geary, 2010). Although much remains to be determined, sex differences in developmental activities appear to mirror later differences in parenting and in patterns of intrasexual competition and intersexual choice. For these behaviors, adult skills emerge from an interaction between hormone exposure guiding predispositions to engage in and practice these behaviors during development. In other words, hormones act to increase attention to and behavioral engagement in sexually selected behavior during development, but the achievement of adult-level competencies often requires extended practice of these behaviors prior to adulthood.

## SEXUAL SELECTION IN HUMANS

Given that sex differences are common across species and the evolution and proximate expression of these differences can be understood in terms of sexual selection and the action of sex hormones, respectively, it follows that these same mechanisms can be used to understand many human sex differences. Most generally and on the basis of cross-species patterns (Andersson, 1994; Plavcan & van Schaik, 1997), some of the best evidence that sexual selection has operated during human evolution includes sex differences in physical size, upper-body musculature, rate and pattern of physical development, and

hormonal and other physiological responses to stressors and competition (Geary, 2010; Stark et al., 2006; Stroud et al., 2002). These sex differences strongly support the proposal that physical male–male competition was important during human evolution, because differences in these traits are consistently found for species in which there is intense male–male competition (Andersson, 1994).

Humans provide a particularly complex picture of the dynamics of sexual selection. We are unusual among mammals, and even among primates, in that we live in multi-male, multi-female groups in which men often invest in their children, though not to the same extent as women (Flinn et al., 2007; Geary, 2000). The result is male choice, female–female competition, as well as the traditional female choice and male–male competition, although the nature of the competition varies by sex (Geary, 2010). It also appears that there is more intrasexual variation in human reproductive strategies than found in other species. This variation is influenced by the socio-economic context and local mortality risks (Chisholm, 1993; Wilson & Daly, 1997), the availability of social support (Hrdy, 2007), developmental history (Ellis, 2004), and genetics (Figueredo et al., 2006; Kirk et al., 2001).

A full review of how sexual selection can be used to understand the many features of male–male competition, female choice, female–female competition and male choice is beyond the scope of this chapter (see Geary, 2010). Our goal is to briefly note some of the basic sex differences in intrasexual competition and parental investment and then tie these to emerging sex differences in children's activities. We focus on developmental activities, such as play, because childhood experiences and expectations are hypothesized to be critical social influences on children's emerging sex-typed behavior (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002; see also Bussey, Chapter 6 this volume). We are not proposing that early social influences are unimportant, but rather make the point that many of these same behaviors are consistent with the practice and refinement of

behaviors that have evolved by means of sexual selection.

### ***Intrasexual Competition***

In many traditional societies, and likely throughout much of human evolution, men form cooperative kin-based coalitions and cooperate to compete with other kin-based coalitions for control of ecological resources and social and political influence (Chagnon, 1988). This can take the form of low-level, but frequent, raiding, warfare, and political manipulation, and is related to the construction and use of weapons and other tools (Keeley, 1996). Men in successful coalitions have more reproductive opportunities and success than men in less successful coalitions, with dominant men in successful coalitions being the most reproductively successful (Zerjal et al., 2003). Group dynamics include one-on-one male–male competition that is a mixture of physical contests and social/political maneuvering. The result is the creation of dominance hierarchies and control of ingroup politics.

Humans exhibit the typical mammalian pattern in which males compete over available females, since females are the sex that invests more. However, as noted, males do invest in children, creating a reproductive resource for women to compete over as well. All men are not equal, however, in terms of their value as potential males, and competition is expected over the most desirable mates, those who offer good genes, but also signal the ability and willingness to invest in a woman and her children (Geary, 2010). Women are, thus, predicted to, and do, compete with each other over this investment, but not as physically as males. Physical competition, with the potential for serious injury and death, incurs more potential reproductive costs and less benefits than male–male competition (Geary, 2010; Taylor et al., 2000). More typically, female–female competition involves indirect forms of aggression (i.e., relational aggression), which include gossip and other strategies aimed at disrupting the social networks of the

competitor (Grotzinger & Crick, 1996; Smith, Rose, & Schwartz-Mette, 2010). Relational aggression requires more personal knowledge about, and attention to, other individuals in the group than is necessary with physical aggression. This knowledge is used to backbite, shun, and ridicule competitors. The goals include making competitors appear unattractive as mating partners (e.g., calling them ‘sluts’: Geary, 2010; Geary, Byrd-Craven, Hoard, Vigil, & Numtee, 2003); driving them out of the social group, effectively eliminating them as mating partners to men in the group; or disrupting their social support system. The latter can negatively influence their health and that of their children (Geary, 2010; Taylor et al., 2000). An extreme example comes from polygamous marriages, in which some women kill the children of co-wives (Strassmann, 1997), though this strategy is risky due to the likelihood of retaliation and loss of the husband’s investment.

Men’s one-on-one physical male–male competition and coalitional competition is predicted to result in differences in the extent to which boys and girls self-initiate or selectively imitate and thus practice and refine the underlying physical, behavioral, and social competencies that facilitate these forms of competition in adulthood. Similarly, women’s tendency to compete relationally rather than physically is predicted to result in a corresponding developmental sex difference: specifically, a greater focus of girls on the nuances of social relationships (e.g., who is friends with whom) and use of personal information to manipulate and disrupt the relationships of same-sex competitors.

### ***Parental Investment***

More maternal than paternal availability for, and engagement with, children is found in all human cultures (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; Konner, 2005; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). In Whiting and Whiting’s (1975) classic study, three- to six-year-olds in Kenya, India, Mexico, the Philippines, Japan, and the United States



were found to be in the proximity of, or in contact with, their mother between 32% to 47% of the time in five of the six cultures and 9% of the time in the sixth (a rural village in Japan); the latter is biased, because observations were not taken in the household. In these same communities, children were in the proximity of or in contact with their father between 3% and 14% of the time. A similar pattern was found for four- to 10-year-olds in communities in Africa, South Asia, South America, Central America, and North America (Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Here, children were found to be in the presence of their mother 2–4 times more frequently than in the presence of their father. Observation of five- to seven-year-olds in Kenya, Guatemala, Peru, and the United States indicated that children were much more likely to be directly engaged in activities with women – mother, grandmother, aunt – than with men. The smallest difference was found in the United States, where children of this age were found to be directly engaged with women 2½ times more frequently than they were engaged with men. The sex difference in parental care is even more pronounced for infants and toddlers (i.e., the first three years of life: Crano & Aronoff, 1978).

These sex differences are not because men cannot care for children. When fathers do interact with infants and young children they show many of the same characteristics as mothers and can provide competent routine care (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989). Nor can the sex difference be attributed to father absence, because he is away hunting or working outside of the home. Belsky, Gilstrap, and Rovine (1984) found that when both parents were present, American mothers spontaneously engaged their infant 1½ to 2 times more frequently and provided routine care 3–4 times more frequently than did fathers. The same pattern is found in Australia, Belgium, France, Eastern and Western regions of Germany, Great Britain, Israel, and Sweden (Cooke, 2004; Lamb, Frodi, Hwang, & Frodi, 1982; Lampert & Friedman, 1992). Observation

of parental care in the Aché, !Kung San (Botswana), Hadza (Tanzania), Efe (Congo), Aka (Central African Republic), and Agta (Philippines) and other societies reveals the same pattern (Konner, 2005).

These differences are certainly influenced by men's personality, quality of their marital relationship, culture (e.g., rules against polygynous marriages), and other social factors (see Geary, 2000), but their consistency with sexual selection and mammalian sex differences in the potential rate of reproduction cannot be denied. These differences in adulthood are mirrored in earlier differences in children's play parenting.

## EMERGENCE OF SEX-TYPED BEHAVIOR IN HUMANS

In the following section, we outline what is known about human sex differences during infancy and childhood as they relate to the above-described sex differences in intrasexual competition and parental investment.

### *Sex Differences in Infancy*

With the study of developmental sex differences, it is often assumed that biologically influenced sex differences will manifest early in development, and any later-occurring sex differences are largely the result of an accumulation of cultural factors such as gender roles and socializing agents such as parents (Whiting & Edwards, 1973). This is incorrect. In many species in which sexual selection has resulted in the evolution of sex differences, these differences are often not obvious until sexual maturation (Darwin, 1871), when the effect of sex hormones produces behavioral effects by interacting with existing brain structures (Del Giudice, Ellis, & Shirtcliff, 2011). From this perspective, infant boys and infant girls, like infants of many other species, are expected to be more similar than different, and this is the case (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).



Based on the mechanisms of sexual selection, those sex differences that are found in infancy are predicted to reflect the beginnings of the later sex differences in play and social development (described below), which, in turn, should provide the developmental experience and practice necessary to acquire the behavioral, social, and cognitive competencies associated with sex differences in adulthood. Practice is necessary to fine-tune these competencies to the current cultural and contextual demands in which the individual is situated (Geary, 2010). Consistent with these predictions, several patterns described in the infancy literature suggest early differences that may provide the essential structure of later sex differences in social and play activities (Block, 1976; Fagan, 1972; Gunnar & Stone, 1984; Kujawski & Bower, 1993; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). Prenatal and early postnatal androgen exposure may result in early predispositions that manifest as attentional and perceptual biases for processing social and other stimuli (Alexander, 2003). These early biases result in experiences that selectively maintain or prune associated neural pathways, leading to a developmental increase in the magnitude of the corresponding sex differences (Geary, 2010).

Sex differences in infancy are found primarily in general orientation toward other people, empathy, and object orientation. Differences in brain activity while infants view social information, such as faces, confirm that there are attentional biases present very early in life and that they become fine-tuned with development and social experience (Grossmann & Johnson, 2007). A variety of behavioral measures, such as the duration of eye contact, empathetic responses to the distress of others, recognition of faces, and time spent looking at faces, have all shown an early and consistent social bias with girls orienting to other people more frequently than do boys (Connellan, Baron-Cohen, Wheelwright, Bataki, & Ahluwalia, 2001; Freedman, 1974; McClure, 2000; McGuinness & Pribram, 1979). Early attention to people and the subtleties of others' emotions provides, in theory, fine-tuning

of skills related to care of infants, but also monitoring the give-and-take within relationships characteristic of reciprocal altruism (Geary et al., 2003; Geary, 2010).

These studies presented infants with a single face, voice, or movement pattern, or with a pair of individuals. The studies may thus capture infants' relative interest in individual people, but generally failed to examine attention to another important social dynamic that is likely to be relevant to males: behavior in relation to groups. Based on an evolutionary history of coalitions of males competing against one another, it follows that males would be predisposed to attend more to groups than to individuals. In a series of relevant studies, six- to eight-month-old infants were presented with video clips of a single puppet or a group of puppets. Both girls and boys looked longer at the group, but the bias was larger in boys (83%) than in girls (63%) (Benenson, Duggan, & Markovits, 2004). The same procedure was used in a follow-up study in which infants watched film clips of six-year-old boys and six-year-old girls in groups of six or as individuals. Again, infants of both sexes looked longer at the groups of children, but the difference was larger in boys. Boy infants watched the groups of boys significantly longer than did the girl infants, but there was no sex differences in the amount of time spent watching the groups of girls (Benenson, Markovits, Muller, Challen, & Carder, 2007). These results are intriguing and consistent with infant boys having the seeds of a basic predisposition to attend to coalitional activities, especially those involving other boys. Further, it is important to note that this occurs prior to the awareness of gender or the implications of being gender-congruent.

There also appear to be early sex differences in orientation to some types of physical information, such as shapes and aspects of mechanical motion (Cohen & Gelber, 1975; McGuinness & Pribram, 1979), although there are more similarities than differences (Spelke, 2005). In Connellan et al.'s (2001) study of newborns, greater sex differences

were found when looking at a mobile than looking at a face. Forty-three percent of boys looked longer at the mobile compared with 17% of girls, indicating a motivation to attend to that type of stimulus. When 12-month-olds were shown videos of a moving car or a moving face, twice as many boys (79%) as girls (37%) spent more time watching the car than the face (Lutchmaya & Baron-Cohen, 2002).

In conclusion, infant girls' early orientation toward people presages later sex differences in interest in interpersonal relationships and gaining information about other people, both being necessary for later cooperation and relational aggression (Geary, 2010; Geary et al., 2003). Benenson et al.'s (2007) research indicates that infant boys are not disinterested in social information, but rather group activities, in contrast to individuals, capture their attention more readily than it captures that of girls. We suggest this early bias has evolved roots in male–male coalitional competition. Similarly, infant boys' interest in objects presages later sex differences in object-oriented and mechanical play that may facilitate learning about and using tools, a component of male-typical activities in traditional societies including the construction of weapons used in male–male competition.

### ***Developmental Sex Differences***

We now consider sex differences in children's play that have been found cross-culturally. Children's engagement in culture-specific games may provide important practice and refinement of behaviors related to later functional activities, such as survival, competition, and reproduction in adulthood, as found for other species that engage in juvenile play (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). There is evidence that sex differences in children's self-initiated play activities recreate and thus provide practice with the social dynamics that are associated with sex differences in intrasexual competition and parental investment during human evolution (Geary & Bjorklund, 2000; Bjorklund & Pellegrini, 2002; Geary, 2010).

One of the most consistent sex differences in social behavior is the formation of same-sex play and social groups (Maccoby, 1998). This results in children spending much of their childhood in distinctly different same-sex cultures. Children's tendency to segregate themselves into same-sex groups appears to be related to the different play and social styles of girls and boys (Maccoby, 1988), which appears to be influenced by prenatal hormone exposure (Pasterski et al., 2011). Boys and girls, on average, prefer different play activities. They both attempt to gain control of desired resources (e.g., toys) or to influence group activities (Charlesworth & Dzur, 1987) but often do so in different ways. Sex segregated social groups may result from children generally being unresponsive to the play and social-influence styles of the opposite sex (Benenson et al., 2002; Maccoby, 1988).

Cultural nuances are then laid on top of these underlying differences. In other words, the expression of sex differences in childhood play is plastic and sensitive to socialization. This socialization reflects the demands for each sex in that particular culture.

### ***Rough-and-Tumble Play***

Rough-and-tumble play occurs most frequently in the species and sex in which social conflict in adulthood is resolved through physical contests, and it has been suggested that these play activities provide practice needed to develop related social-competitive skills (Pellis, Field, Smith, & Pellis, 1997). Rough-and-tumble play (e.g., playful physical assaults, wrestling) occurs three to six times more frequently among boys than girls (DiPietro, 1981; Maccoby, 1988). This sex difference is found in all modern societies in which it has been studied and in many traditional ones as well (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; Maccoby, 1988; Whiting & Edwards, 1973, 1988), and appears to be practice for establishing one-on-one dominance relationships (Omark, Omark, & Edelman, 1975).

The sex difference emerges at about three years of age (Maccoby, 1988) and peaks at about 10 years (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). As boys move toward adolescence, the roughness of the play intensifies and the line between play and outright physical aggression becomes less clear. Bullying among boys of this age often increases at the beginning of the school year and decreases later in the year, likely a result of the establishment of a dominance hierarchy (Pellegrini & Bartini, 2001). In younger boys, physical aggression is often associated with social rejection. However, during the adolescent transition, physical bullying in boys is associated with the achievement of social dominance, as defined by peers and teachers, and with a higher frequency of dating and higher rated attractiveness by girls (Bukowski, Sippola, & Newcomb, 2000). This does not necessarily mean that these boys are 'liked' in the traditional sense, but they do have social presence and influence (Berger, 2007). In fact, a mix of coercive and prosocial strategies to achieve dominance, depending on the context and the relationship, is associated with effective control of social resources in both sexes (Hawley et al., 2007); the sex difference is in the frequency and pattern of physical aggression and social manipulation.

The intensity and nature of boys' rough-and-tumble play varies with the intensity of physical male-male competition, especially intergroup warfare, in adulthood (Ember & Ember, 1994). For example, in the Yanomamö, in which between-group warfare is intense and commonplace, parents (often fathers) encourage the escalation of rough-and-tumble play and instill aggression and emotional indifference in their sons (Ember & Ember, 1994). The same is true for other cultures, such as the Sioux of North America, who encouraged boys to engage in war-related games, one-on-one aggression, and activities that increased their physical endurance (Loy & Hesketh, 1995). However, even in societies in which the majority of men do not engage in either one-on-one or intergroup physical aggression, boys engage in play fighting and

aggressive games, though they are more tempered (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). In these societies, adults often discourage boys from engaging in games that get too rough, and adults often redirect this aggression into culture-specific forms of competition, such as sports and education (Geary, 2010; Keeley, 1996).

### *Coalitions*

The earlier described sex difference in infants' interest in groups (Benenson et al., 2004) continues into childhood and beyond. Boys have been consistently found to organize themselves into much larger social groups than girls (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). These groups are focused on engaging in inter-group competition and form within-group dominance hierarchies and within-group role specialization to facilitate this goal (Lever, 1978). Boys' social play, on average, involves more explicit goals and more risk-taking than girls' social activities (Benenson et al., 1997; Maccoby, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1987). For example, Lever (1978) found that 11-year-old boys' games were more complex and they engaged in group-level competition three times as often as did same-aged girls. Similarly, Berenbaum and Snyder (1995) found that, on average, boys reported engaging in athletic competition significantly more often than girls.

The sex differences in predisposition to engage in group-level competitive activities are related, in part, to prenatal androgen exposure (Collaer & Hines, 1995). Girls affected by congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH), a condition that results in increased prenatal androgen exposure, are more likely than unaffected girls to participate in athletic competition and to engage in more playful physical assaults (Hines & Kaufman, 1994). In a larger-scale study, parents reported more physical aggression for daughters with CAH than for their unaffected sisters (Pasterski et al., 2007). In this study, four out of five girls with CAH were reported as being more aggressive than the average unaffected girl. Boys' focus on larger groups and role differentiation and

formation of dominance hierarchies within their groups, along with the role of prenatal androgen exposure, is consistent with the view that these activities serve to develop and refine competencies associated with intra-sexual male–male coalitional competition in adulthood (Geary, 2010; Geary et al., 2003).

The social styles of boys follow from the types of activities they prefer. On average, compared with girls, boys interrupt more during conversations, are less likely to acknowledge another's viewpoint, are more focused on dominance and status, are more likely to be directly competitive, are more tolerant of inequalities in relationships and interpersonal conflict, and are less attentive to the emotional states of others (Benenson et al., 2002; Benenson et al., 2007; Buck et al., 1972; Maccoby, 1998). It is not that boys do not value intimacy in their interpersonal relationships; they do and must in order to develop and maintain coalitions. Intimacy in boys groups is often achieved through shared activities, especially when coordinated behavior is needed to achieve mutual goals (Sherif et al., 1961; Savin-Williams, 1987). The close camaraderie that is often associated with team sports is often a unique source of intimacy for boys (Zarbatany et al., 2000). These feelings of intimacy with other group members during competition and with the achievement of shared goals are aspects of the proximate, here-and-now, mechanisms that reinforce boys' predisposition to form coalitions and to compete with other coalitions. These are exactly the patterns one would expect for a species with an evolutionary history of male–male coalitional competition (Geary et al., 2003).

### *Relational Aggression*

Within girls groups, two types of social relationships often emerge, those that involve learning to develop and maintain reciprocal relationships, that is, close friendships, and those that allow the practice and refinement of relational aggression, maneuvering social relationships to best achieve one's interests. For girls, the establishment

of reciprocal relationships involves interpersonal intimacy, which is typically achieved through dyadic self-disclosure, emotional support, and an ethos of reciprocity (Geary et al., 2003). In fact, girls are, on average, more sensitive to socio-emotional cues of a dyadic partner (Buck et al., 1972), and work harder to minimize inequalities and conflict within the relationship (Benenson et al., 2002). Girls' relationships are more likely to permanently dissolve as a result of conflict if strict reciprocity is not maintained (Benenson & Christakos, 2003; Benenson et al., 2002; Geary, 2010). These relationships are few in number, relative to boys' coalitions, but are critical to their social and emotional health and to the health of their children in adulthood (Geary, 2010; Taylor et al., 2000).

Aggression among girls is less direct than among boys and in adolescence is often over the attention of a would-be boyfriend, that is, it is an early expression of intrasexual competition (Savin-Williams, 1987; Smith et al., 2010). Girls also appear to be more sensitive to relational aggression than boys, as it is more distressing to them and more likely to affect their self-concept and result in internalizing disorders (e.g., depression and anxiety; Crick & Zahn-Waxler, 2003; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2000). This is not due to differences in frequency in which boys and girls engage in relational aggression (Galen & Underwood, 1997), but rather the heightened interpersonal intimacy among girls comes at a cost of greater vulnerability to social manipulation and other forms of relational aggression (e.g., gossip) should the friendship dissolve (Bond et al., 2001). For girls, former friends know more potentially embarrassing information about each other than boys, and many girls use this information in the context of relational aggression after the relationship ends. Moreover, girls are more sensitive to relational aggression generally, not just that from former friends. Girls who are victims of relational aggression are twice as likely to suffer from depression or anxiety than girls who are not victims or boys who are victims (Bond et al., 2001). This risk is particularly high if

they lack social support from friends or family (Kendler, Myers, & Prescott, 2005). This is precisely the predicted, evolved function of relational aggression: Girls and women who are anxious, depressed, and socially ostracized are not likely to be strong competitors for mates or other resources.

At the same time, those who can manipulate the social relationships and reputations of competitors and, at the same time, hide this aggression in the guise of rationality, advice, and casual comments should be at a competitive advantage. Most of the research on this topic, unfortunately, has been on the victims of relational aggression, not the successful aggressors. Some studies show that those who are skilled at relational aggression are socially prominent in their peer groups (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004) and are effective at controlling social resources (Hawley, 2003; Hawley et al., 2007). In short, relational aggression is a strategy that functions to organize the social world in subtle, but self-serving ways. Given that physical female–female aggression has almost certainly been less common than physical male–male competition during our evolutionary history, and that women are expected to compete with one another for mates and other resources, women's use of and sensitivity to relational aggression is not surprising. During the developmental period, girls become increasingly skilled at disguising these behaviors and using them to get what they want, in much the same way that with practice and experience during development boys' coalitions congeal into effective, competitive groups (Geary, 2010).

### *Play Parenting*

As young boys are practicing and refining social dominance skills through rough-and-tumble play and coalition building with competitive group games, young girls are engaging in another form of skill development through play parenting. The sex difference in play parenting emerges around the same time as the sex difference in rough-and-tumble play, around three years, and becomes more robust

with development (Lever, 1978). For primates in which it has been studied, early play parenting has been found to substantially reduce the mortality of firstborn offspring, suggesting the early play parenting improves caretaking competencies (Nicolson, 1987).

Some have suggested that girls' involvement in play parenting is due, at least in part, to them being more frequently assigned childcare roles, especially for infants. While it is true that girls are more often assigned these roles (Whiting & Edwards, 1988), this may be at least partially due to the fact that they seek out and engage in childcare, play parenting, and other domestic activities (e.g., playing house) more frequently than do same-age boys (Pitcher & Schultz, 1983).

Girls' engagement in play parenting has been documented in Western societies as well as across many traditional societies, such as the Yanomamö, the !Ko bushmen of the central Kalahari, and the Himba of Southwest Africa (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1989; Kamei, 2005). The extent of these differences has been shown to vary across age and context (Whiting & Edwards, 1988), indicating that they are refined to current contextual demands. At the same time, several studies have shown that these play activities are related to prenatal exposure to androgens, mirroring the findings with rough-and-tumble play (Lutchmaya et al., 2002). Girls affected by CAH engage less frequently in play with dolls and show less interest in infants (Berenbaum & Snyder, 1995; Collaer & Hines, 1995). Recent behavioral genetic evidence suggests that these play differences are related, in part, to genes, although experiences show an important influence as well (Iervolino et al., 2005).

Taken together, these findings suggest that sex differences in caregiving and play parenting are not simply due to a sex difference in socially assigned roles. It is not known at this time if play parenting influences women's later competence in dealing with their own children, but these findings are nonetheless consistent with the earlier described sex differences in the level of parental investment (Geary, 2010).



## CONCLUSION

Sex differences continue to be a subject of debate, speculation, and research (see Eagly, Chapter 2 this volume; Morton, Chapter 23 this volume). Our assertion is that knowledge of human evolution, specifically the processes surrounding sexual selection, can enhance our understanding of these differences and allow us to make predictions about them and how they are expressed. This perspective has yet to be integrated into mainstream psychological research, despite the acceptance of sexual selection into mainstream biology and the overwhelming evidence for its validity (Andersson, 1994). The resistance to sexual selection or biological influences more generally on the expression of sex differences may result from a belief that such influences are immutable or are an alternative to socialization theory. It is clear that these are potential influences on the expression of human sex differences; it is also clear that developmental experiences and current social conditions can also influence the expression of sex differences, as is the case for many other species (Geary, 2010). Sexual selection is not an alternative to gender roles or related theories (Eagly, 1987), rather it provides a broader perspective within which these social mechanisms can be more fully understood, as it incorporates both sexually selected traits and plastic refinement of those traits to current contextual demands.

The length of the developmental period in humans allows for a considerable amount of plasticity in evolved traits and allows evolved competencies to be adapted and refined to the nuances of the local conditions. Children's attentional biases, self-directed play, and social activities reflect the seeds of human evolutionary history. Sex differences in attention to individuals or groups, empathy, rough-and-tumble play, forming competitive coalitions, and forms of aggression are consistent with the tenants of sexual selection operating throughout human history. Through parenting practices, selective imitation, experiences in same-sex groups and gender

schemas, girls and boys practice and learn how best to achieve competencies associated with success in their particular culture. Sexual selection provides a powerful set of mechanisms that allow scientists to incorporate children's behavior and development into a wider evolutionary framework that at the same time allows for social and other experiential forces on emerging sex differences.

The existence of gender schemas and their modification is not alternative theory to the influence of sexual selection on human sex differences. Rather, it is complementary and even compatible with an evolutionary history of sexual selection in our species. Cultural success is expressed differently across cultures and historical periods (Irons, 1979). Human societies and what it takes to be culturally and reproductively successful in them can change from one generation to the next. There must be proximate social (in addition to hormonal) mechanisms that allow children to modify the expression of their evolutionarily shaped biases so they are expressed in ways that can maximize cultural success. Gender schemas may be one such mechanism. Sexual selection provides the skeletal structure for differences between the sexes, but mechanisms such as gender schemas and socialization appear to enable us to maximize or minimize these inherent differences, based on the specific cultural demands in which we are situated.

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# Precarious Manhood

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## INTRODUCTION

In his cross-cultural study of manhood, anthropologist David Gilmore (1990) observed a near-universal tendency for people to treat manhood as a precarious social status, one that is difficult to achieve and, once earned, easy to lose. Across dozens of cultures that otherwise differ in many ways, adolescent males must earn their status as 'real men' by undergoing painful, difficult, and/or dangerous tests of physical endurance. Even successfully passing these rituals, however, does not ensure one's manhood status permanently: 'Real men' must demonstrate their manhood status repeatedly through action, and those who fail to do so are deemed unmanly. In contrast, womanhood is typically treated as an ascribed rather than achieved status in that it emerges naturally from biological changes and, once earned, is rarely challenged. Women can behave badly, bring shame upon themselves and their families, and demonstrate behavioral and dispositional shortcomings that render them unappealing persons, but rarely is their very status as women questioned.

In our work on *precarious manhood*, we propose that occupying an elusive and tenuous gender status has important implications

for men's functioning across a variety of domains (Bosson & Vandello, 2011). Here, we place our work into a larger context by considering the male gender role and stereotypes about men within US psychology, as well as across history, cultures, and disciplines. Next, we describe our model of precarious manhood and summarize the efforts of our empirical investigations. We end by considering how work on precarious manhood can contribute to a comprehensive understanding of men's physical aggression.

## A HISTORY OF RESEARCH ON THE MALE GENDER ROLE WITHIN US PSYCHOLOGY

In the psychology of the past 50 years, 'womanlessness' was reflected in the disproportionate use of males as experimental subjects, in the failure to examine gender differences when both sexes were used as subjects, in the assumption that conclusions drawn from the study of male behavior applied to women, and more generally in the lack of attention to gender as a category of social reality. (Crawford & Marecek, 1989, p. 149)

As noted by feminist scholars, psychology was a 'womanless' discipline for much of its early history. If women were considered at

all, it was often in an effort to demonstrate their intellectual inferiority to men, their emotional and illogical nature, and their predilection for motherhood above all else (Shields, 1975). But if research psychology was not interested in women's experiences as women, it was similarly neglectful of men's experiences as men. That men were taken to represent 'people' in general does not imply that they were viewed as gendered persons. To the contrary, men were often treated as if they had no gender (Kimmel & Messner, 1989). As Brod (1987, p. 264) noted: 'Androcentric scholarship is only *seemingly* about men. In reality, it is, at best, only negatively about men, that is, it is about men only by virtue of not being about women.' Thus, one might argue that research psychology, in its beginnings, was manless as well as womanless.

This started to change in the early 1920s, when Lewis Terman began devising a standardized measure of masculine and feminine personality types (Terman & Miles, 1936). Terman and his collaborator, Catherine Miles, conducted an ambitious investigation of gender differences in personality that culminated in the 1936 publication of their book *Sex and Personality*. Although much prior psychology research examined sex differences (e.g., Ellis, 1894), the bulk of this work focused on intellectual and perceptual abilities rather than social and emotional tendencies. Moreover, attempts to locate sex differences in the more basic intellectual and cognitive abilities produced inconsistent and non-replicable findings. Undaunted by the 'growing tendency to concede equality or near equality with respect to general intelligence and the majority of special talents', Terman and Miles sought to establish sex differences in people's 'sentiments, interests, attitudes, and modes of behavior' (1936, pp. 1–2). The resulting masculine–feminine (M–F) scale produced large, replicable gender differences, which is perhaps unsurprising given that items were selected to maximally distinguish men's and women's responses. The findings from this work revealed that boys and men displayed preferences for activities and occupations

involving aggression, risk, adventure, the outdoors, and extra-domestic (e.g., public domain) affairs; in terms of personality, they appeared assertive, unsympathetic, and emotionally inexpressive. In contrast, girls' and women's responses revealed preferences for domestic activities and aesthetic experiences, as well as greater emotionality, more sympathetic and humanitarian tendencies, and an interest in personal appearance.

Several assumptions characterized the M–F scale. First, it treated masculinity and femininity as opposite ends of a unidimensional continuum. Being masculine thus meant, by definition, *not* being feminine. Second, whereas Terman and Miles (1936) remained agnostic regarding the relative contributions of biological versus social factors in shaping masculine and feminine personalities overall, they conceded a predominant role of environment (i.e., parenting) in creating 'male sexual inverts' or homosexuals. Based on the finding that some subsets of gay men obtained feminine scores on the M–F scale but displayed no other detectable physical or biological differences from 'normal' heterosexual men, Terman and his graduate student, E. Lowell Kelly, concluded that at least some forms of homosexuality must result from psychological conditioning of children by their parents early in life (Minton, 1986).

This conclusion – that some cases of homosexuality reflected abnormal childhood socialization within the family – was consistent with psychodynamic theories that were popular at the time. As noted by Pleck (1981), research on gender roles in the United States from the 1930s through the 1970s was dominated by a set of assumptions that he refers to as the Male Sex Role Identity (MSRI) paradigm. Grounded in psychodynamic thought and influenced by the writings of Adler (1927) and Horney (1932), the MSRI paradigm assumed that people have an innate need to develop an 'appropriate' gender identity, but that the process of doing so is uncertain and failure-prone, especially for boys and men. Any number of familial and/or parenting factors might interfere with boys' development of a



healthy (i.e., heterosexual, confident) gender identity, resulting in an insufficiently gender-typed child or adolescent. For example, early childhood experiences such as exposure to an effeminate father or masculine mother might ‘accentuate homosexual tendencies’ (Henry, 1937, p. 903).

Homosexuality may have been the most feared outcome of improper childhood socialization, but it was not the only one. Theorists at the time assumed that proper gender role identification was necessary for general psychological well-being. Acceptance and internalization of one’s gender role was viewed as an index of mental health. Boys who lacked a strong male role model, or who identified too closely with female role models, were destined to become neurotic, pathological, incompetent, or delinquent (Pleck, 1981). For example, an overly close relationship between a boy and his mother was posited to foster unresolved feminine identification, and could lead to aggression and delinquency (Parsons, 1947). Further, feelings of inferiority about one’s masculinity might encourage overcompensation in the form of a rigid, hostile, authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950).

Starting in the early 1960s, the second wave of the feminist movement inspired the beginnings of a paradigm shift. As women began questioning the treatment of gender within mainstream psychology, a focus on men as gendered beings gradually began to emerge in both popular and scholarly works (Cochran, 2010). It was around this time that men’s consciousness-raising groups started forming, catalyzing new ways of thinking about the male role. By the 1970s, many gender theorists viewed traditional gender role identity development as: (1) shaped by external forces rather than innate tendencies, (2) inherently contradictory and impossible to uphold, and (3) psychologically maladaptive and restrictive for both sexes (e.g., Bem, 1975; Brannon & David, 1976; Pleck & Sawyer, 1974). Moreover, this new wave of scholars raised serious questions about bipolar conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity,

positing that the personality dimensions underlying ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ tendencies were instead orthogonal (e.g., Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1973). Still, the assumptions of the MSRI paradigm did not disappear entirely. Even in scholarly works that promoted feminist thinking, one could view psychodynamic assumptions about the unique difficulties for boys and men of attaining a healthy and normal masculine identity. For instance, in *The Liberated Man*, Farrell (1974, p. 116) noted that ‘[t]he mother-dominated boy is not only excessively passive in many cases, but develops many of the very traits of traditional femininity, such as lack of self-confidence, which we are suggesting is harmful to either sex’.

With these shifts in thinking about gender roles within psychology came an increasing emphasis on examining the social construction of manhood from interdisciplinary viewpoints (Cochran, 2010). Academic courses and conferences focusing on Men’s Studies emerged at US universities in the late 1970s, gaining popularity throughout the 1980s (Kimmel, 1987; Shiffman, 1987). In 1990, the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity (SPSMM) was founded to promote critical investigations of the role of gender in men’s lives. Marking the importance of this organization within psychology, SPSMM became Division 51 of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1997. At the same time, academic journals dedicated to research on men and masculinity began to emerge: *The Journal of Men’s Studies* was first published in 1990, and *Men and Masculinities* appeared in 1998. *Psychology of Men and Masculinity*, the first APA-published journal dedicated exclusively to empirical psychological investigations of the male gender role, was established in 2000.

Today, psychologists study the male gender role from a variety of perspectives. Those who take an evolutionary approach tend to interpret gender differences as evolved psychological mechanisms that promoted ancestral men’s reproductive success (e.g., Buss, 1995; Mackey, 2001; see Byrd-Craven & Geary,



Chapter 7 this volume). Conversely, theorists who take a social roles approach locate the source of men's personality and behavioral tendencies, as well as stereotypes about men, within long-established divisions of labor that derive from physical differences between men and women (e.g., Eagly & Wood, 1999). Still others focus on the personal and interpersonal consequences to men of upholding or violating gender role norms (e.g., Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor, 2005; Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2001). Reflecting this latter perspective, some theorists focus primarily on the potentially harmful psychological and physical consequences to men of adherence to a gender role that narrowly constrains their behavioral and emotional options (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; Garnets & Pleck, 1979; O'Neil, 1981; Pleck, 1981, 1995). Our work on precarious manhood continues in this vein by highlighting the (often maladaptive) implications for men of occupying an unstable gender status.

## **BELIEFS ABOUT MANHOOD ACROSS DISCIPLINES AND CULTURES**

Exhortations to 'Be a man' or 'Man up' suggest not only that manhood is desirable, but that it is under volitional control – something that boys and men can, and should, make happen. What does it mean to be a man in the contemporary United States and beyond? Our schemas of men (and women) consist of personality stereotypes, roles, behaviors, and physical appearance (Spence, Deaux, & Helmreich, 1985). Furthermore, these schemas are not limited to the categories 'men' and 'women' as a whole, but include more nuanced subcategories for gender-related subtypes. For instance, people tend to place men into subcategories of 'blue-collar working man', 'macho man', 'athletic man', and 'business man' (Deaux, Winton, Crowley, & Lewis, 1985), each of which contains its own (sometimes overlapping) stereotypical traits, roles, and physical attributes. Here, we briefly review cross-disciplinary work on male stereotypes

and the male gender role. The first thing to note is that there is no single, invariant definition of what it means to be a man. As Thompson and Pleck (1995, p. 134) note: 'Studying the male gender role does not lend itself to an unambiguous understanding of men.' Nonetheless, there is an important recurring theme that runs through most of this work: Manhood is widely viewed as a socially conferred status that is achieved and validated through active performance.

A modern, post-MSRI understanding of manhood emerged with fervor in the 1970s with research on gender stereotypes and the content of the male gender role. Across several studies, there emerged some consensus about the core themes of masculinity. Broverman and colleagues (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972) conducted one of the earliest studies of people's perceptions of male and female gender role stereotypes. Characteristics that people agreed were descriptive of men reflected competence, rationality, and assertiveness; characteristics that described women involved warmth and expressiveness. At around the same time, Bem (1974) and Spence et al. (1973) published influential and widely used instruments measuring psychological masculinity and femininity. Bem (1974) asked participants to rate a large pool of traits in terms of what society deemed desirable for a woman or a man. Traits categorized as masculine (that is, rated as significantly more desirable for a man than for a woman by both male and female participants) composed a dimension labeled *instrumental* (e.g., aggressive, ambitious, competitive, dominant, willing to take risks); conversely, feminine traits fell along a dimension labeled *affective* or *expressive*. Similarly, Spence and her colleagues asked respondents how likely men and women are to possess certain traits, and two dimensions emerged: *instrumentality* and *expressivity*. Items falling along the instrumental dimension were seen as applying mainly to men and items tapping expressivity were seen as applying to women. In short, research on gender stereotypes has consistently identified a group of

traits associated with the male gender role that centers on a theme of instrumentality or agency (Ashmore, Del Boca, & Wohlers, 1986).

More recent research has refined the notion of gender stereotypes to emphasize both prescriptive (preferred or required for one's gender) and proscriptive (discouraged or prohibited for one's gender) elements (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Thus, men and women are defined not solely by qualities they are expected to have, but also by qualities they must avoid. For example, American men should not be emotional, shy, naïve, or weak. Notably, research indicates that male prescriptions are aligned with high status, and male proscriptions are aligned with low status (Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012).

Interestingly, men's (and women's) tendency to define their own personality traits in gender stereotypical terms differs reliably across cultures (Guimond et al., 2007). In cultures characterized by lower levels of gender equality (i.e., larger power differences between men and women), men describe themselves in terms that are *less* gender-stereotyped as compared to men from cultures characterized by greater gender equality. This may occur because of differences in the reference groups against which men compare themselves when rating themselves on gender-typed traits. In cultures with less gender equality, men compare themselves primarily to other men (who are perceived as relatively similar to the self) when rating themselves on gendered traits, because cross-gender comparisons are considered inappropriate. Conversely, in cultures with greater gender equality, men are more likely to compare themselves to both men and women when rating themselves, thus producing self-ratings that are more gender stereotyped.

At the same time that work on the content of gender stereotypes bloomed in the 1970s, related research identified the content of male role norms (Brannon & David, 1976; Cicone & Ruble, 1978; Doyle, 1989; Pleck, 1976, 1981). A recurring theme of this work is 'achieved status through performance'. For

example, Brannon and David identified four major themes of the traditional male role: nothing feminine ('No Sissy Stuff'), achieving status ('The Big Wheel'), toughness, self-reliance, and emotional inexpressiveness ('Sturdy Oak'), and a penchant for aggressiveness and daring ('Give 'em Hell'). Doyle later added a fifth category, 'sexual performance,' to Brannon and David's list. Cicone and Ruble reviewed the empirical literature and concluded that three main themes characterize beliefs about the typical man: he is active and achievement-oriented, dominant in relationships, and level-headed and self-contained. Pleck (1976) echoed these themes, but also noted inconsistencies between traditional and modern images of manliness. Whereas in the traditional male role manhood is validated primarily through physical strength and aggression, in the modern male role manhood is validated primarily through economic achievement. Similarly, whereas emotional sensitivity is proscribed in the traditional male role, in the modern male role, emotional sensitivity is expected in the context of romantic relationships with women.

The work reviewed above sheds light on the meaning of manhood in the contemporary United States, but is this picture shared by other cultures around the world? Cultures vary greatly in their beliefs and rituals concerning gender (see Guimond, Chatard, & Lorenzi Cioldi, Chapter 14, this volume). Some cultures espouse egalitarian norms, while in others men hold much more status than women. In some cultures, men and women freely interact, while in others they are mostly segregated. In some cultures, the relationship between men and women is characterized by fear and mistrust, while in others men and women relate positively. Anthropologists have catalogued the sometimes exotic and colorful ways that gender differs in cultures around the world (Nanda, 1999; Whyte, 1979). This might suggest that gender roles are largely arbitrary, informed by unique local and historical contexts.

Indeed, early work in anthropology championed the view that gender was a largely

arbitrary construction. Perhaps the most well-known early anthropologist, Margaret Mead (1928, 1935), was influential in popularizing this view. Her book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) described a culture in which gender roles were quite different than those familiar to Western readers, where incest was common, and young people deferred marriage for years while enjoying casual sex. Her later book *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935), based on field work with three tribal groups in Papua New Guinea, also challenged the idea of shared gender roles across cultures. In it, Mead described cultures in which men and women were alternately egalitarian, gentle, and cooperative (i.e., feminine), or self-reliant and emotionless (i.e., masculine), or in which Western gender roles seemed to be reversed, with men considered the weaker sex, timid around women, and interested in adornment and self-aggrandizing, trivial pursuits. Around the same time, Murdock (1937) conducted a cross-cultural analysis of pre-industrial societies and concluded that there was great diversity in the sexual divisions of labor. However, our examination of Murdock's data indicates that men almost exclusively performed the most dangerous, risky activities (e.g., pursuing sea mammals, hunting, trapping, fishing). Moreover, Mead's conclusions were challenged in anthropology, as views about the diversity of gender roles across cultures began to shift.

Although early anthropologists believed that gender was a largely arbitrary cultural construction, more recent research reveals greater consensus concerning the components of manhood and expectations and roles for men and women. Friedl (1978) argued that male dominance was nearly universal across cultures, noting that 'societies in which women are consistently dominant do not exist and have never existed' (p. 70). Other work has noted that formal rites of passage into adulthood involving the successful completion of dangerous or physically demanding tests are much more common for men than women (Gilmore, 1990; Herdt, 1982). Research on

cultures of honor in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Latin America identifies a common theme of male honor being dependent on constant vigilance and monitoring to protect one's reputation and that of one's family (Johnson & Lipsett-Rivera, 1998; Loizos, 1978; Peristiany, 1965; Pitt-Rivers, 1965). In these and other cultures, male honor is a social status that must be earned, and forfeiting honor is tantamount to forfeiting one's manhood status (Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

Gilmore (1990) provided the most thorough recent anthropological review of manhood in his book *Manhood in the Making*. He argues that across otherwise diverse cultures there is a common preoccupation with demonstrating manhood through ritual and performance. Like the psychological work on US male role norms and stereotypes, Gilmore finds that people in most cultures around the world define manhood as an elusive status that only occurs through the passage of challenging tests: 'Real manhood ... is not a natural condition that comes about spontaneously through biological maturation but rather is a precarious or artificial state that boys must win against powerful odds' (p. 11). In contrast, 'an authentic femininity rarely involves tests or proofs of action, or confrontations with dangerous foes' (p. 12). Three themes in particular appear to be central to the male role across cultures: impregnator, protector, and provider.

Cross-cultural consensus in beliefs about manhood is consistent with research by Williams and Best (1990), who conducted a 27-nation study of gender stereotypes. Respondents (approximately 100 university students in each country) read a list of 300 adjectives and rated whether each was more descriptive of men or women, or not differentially associated with either. If more than two-thirds of a sample within a culture agreed on a particular term, then cultural consensus was achieved; similarly, cross-cultural consensus was defined as agreement among more than two-thirds of cultures. High degrees of consensus were reached both within and

across cultures, with people from every nation rating men as more adventurous, dominant, and independent than women. In short, the results suggest that despite cultural differences in specific norms and customs regarding manhood, there is substantial agreement across cultures regarding stereotypes of men. Williams and Best proposed that biological differences (men's greater size and strength, women's childbearing) lead to divisions of labor that place responsibility for childcare and domestic duties with women, and providing and protecting with men. Gender stereotypes arise as a rationale for these divisions of labor (see Wood & Eagly, 2002). In turn, gender stereotypes become part of the socialization of children across cultures such that boys are encouraged to become assertive, adventurous, and independent. Thus, these themes about manhood arise across cultures, with minor local variations in specifics.

Historical explorations of manhood in the United States also stress its elusive and tenuous nature. Kimmel (1996) argued that although the concept of manhood underwent dramatic changes over the course of American history, it is always characterized by uncertainty, struggle, and the need to prove oneself. Within politics, Ducat (2004) noted a recurring undercurrent of male anxiety that has shaped the American identity. To be successful, American politicians have to disavow anything feminine. Masculine anxiety and the need to prove one's manhood through action have even been implicated in the highest levels of policy decisions (Fasteau, 1974).

To summarize, cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural research on stereotypes about men and male role norms identifies recurring themes central to what it means to be a man. While these themes have had different names (agency, instrumentality, 'The Big Wheel'), they share the notion that manhood is a status that is achieved and maintained through action. Once achieved, manhood status is tenuous and impermanent, and must be continually and publicly validated and defended. It is important to note, however, that although there are consensually shared themes about the male

gender role, there are also differences in the extent to which men are committed to this model of manhood. Some men adhere deeply to traditional male gender roles and stereotypes, while others reject them.

## THE PRECARIOUS MANHOOD HYPOTHESIS

The idea that manhood is an achieved, tenuous status inspired the first empirical investigations of precarious manhood in our laboratory (Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). Based largely on Gilmore's (1990) work, we conceptualized manhood as a socially conferred, precarious status that, unlike womanhood, is earned by achieving specific social milestones. Once men earn this elusive status, they must continually prove their manhood – especially in front of other men (e.g., Kimmel, 1997) – via action. To ascertain whether contemporary US college students indeed view manhood this way, Vandello et al. (2008, Study 1b) asked participants about the degree to which the transitions from childhood to manhood versus womanhood result from biological changes (e.g., puberty) and social changes (e.g., achieving social goals). Consistent with the notion that manhood must be earned, manhood was seen as requiring more social than biological changes, and it required more social changes than womanhood did. In another study (Study 2), when participants interpreted an ambiguous statement about lost manhood or lost womanhood (i.e., 'I used to be a man [woman]. Now I am no longer a man [woman]'), they were more likely to attribute the loss of manhood to social reasons (e.g., 'losing a job') than physical reasons (e.g., 'growing weak with age'). The opposite pattern was observed for lost womanhood. Moreover, people noted that it was easier for them to interpret statements about lost manhood than womanhood, indicating greater familiarity with the notion that manhood status as compared to womanhood status can be lost.

How do precarious manhood beliefs affect men? If manhood is a valued status that is easily lost, then men should eschew behaviors that could cause others to doubt their manhood. But what behaviors should men avoid? According to Kimmel (1997), the answer is 'feminine ones'. Kimmel argues that masculinity is defined not by what it is, but rather by what it is not – femininity. Thus, the best way to avoid doubts about one's manhood is to avoid behaving in a feminine manner, or showing any preference for feminine ideals or desires. Indeed, developmental psychologists have documented boys' motivation to avoid cross-gender behavior. While both boys and girls are socialized to engage in gender-appropriate play behavior (Lytton & Romney, 1991; Plummer, 2001), boys are punished more harshly for gender atypical behavior than are girls (Levy, Taylor, & Gelman, 1995).

Although many men have been socialized to avoid gender atypical behavior, most will inevitably encounter situations in which their manhood is questioned. And given that manhood has traditionally been associated with power and status, being perceived as less of a man could result in a loss of material resources afforded by the power and status of manhood. Challenges to manhood should therefore have serious psychological, physiological, and behavioral consequences for men. Below, we summarize the results of investigations that demonstrate some of the consequences for men of occupying a precarious gender status.

### ***Anxiety and Physiological Stress***

If manhood is easier to 'lose' than womanhood, we reasoned that men should respond to gender-threatening feedback with more anxiety than women. To test this hypothesis, we first examined the effects of gender threats on men's and women's unobtrusively measured anxious cognitions. Specifically, we gave men and women a bogus test of gender identity and provided them with false feedback about their performance (Vandello et al., 2008, Study 4). Gender-threatened men

learned that they scored below most other men and had a feminine gender identity, while gender-affirmed men received the opposite feedback. Similarly, gender-threatened women learned that they scored below most other women and gender-affirmed women learned that they scored above most other women. Immediately after receiving their feedback, participants did a 28-item word completion task in which seven of the word stems (e.g., STRE\_) could form either anxious (STRESS) or non-anxious (STREET) words. Gender-threatened men completed the word stems with more anxious words than gender-affirmed men, gender-threatened women, or gender-affirmed women. Moreover, gender-threatening feedback had no effect on women's anxious word completions. That a gender status threat elicited anxious cognitions among men, but not women, is consistent with the idea that manhood is experienced as more precarious than womanhood.

Given the effects of gender threats on men's anxious cognitions, we wondered whether such threats would also elicit physiological stress among men. If challenges to manhood status are experienced as psychological stressors, then they should result in increases in cortisol (e.g., Dickerson, Gruenewald, & Kemeny, 2004), which is the primary stress hormone. Moreover, we wondered whether men's cortisol reactivity in response to manhood threats would be moderated by their baseline levels of testosterone. Testosterone is a steroid hormone that has been linked to dominance behavior and status striving in both sexes (e.g., Josephs, Sellers, Newman, & Mehta, 2006), and research indicates that it is a valid and reliable biological marker of individual differences in trait dominance striving (Sellers, Mehl, & Josephs, 2007).

To test our ideas, we collected saliva samples immediately before and 15 minutes after offering participants false feedback about their performance on the same bogus gender test described earlier (Caswell, Bosson, Vandello, & Sellers, 2013). The saliva samples provided us with baseline and post-test measures of testosterone and cortisol.



Interestingly, our findings revealed that the gender-threatening feedback elicited greater increases in cortisol relative to the gender-affirming feedback, but only among men who were *low* in baseline testosterone. We also measured men's anxious cognitions following the gender test feedback, and found that these differed by feedback condition but were not moderated by baseline testosterone. This suggests that, while both high- and low-testosterone men were anxious about the gender threat, low-testosterone men experienced a stronger physiological stress response than high testosterone men. This is consistent with research showing that high testosterone can buffer people against the effects of stress (Hermans et al., 2007). Conversely, men who are chronically low in testosterone may be vulnerable to some of the negative health consequences of prolonged or repeated stress activation.

### ***Aggressive Thoughts and Actions***

We wondered next whether gender threats would activate physically aggressive cognitions among men. If physical action and aggression are means by which men defend their gender status, then reminders of the precariousness of manhood might automatically elicit thoughts relevant to physical aggression among men (but not women). To test this, we exposed men and women to the same gender-threatening and -affirming feedback described above, and then had them do one of two word-completion tasks (Vandello et al., 2008, Study 5). In one condition, the same word stems (e.g., \_UNCH) could be completed in either a physically aggressive (PUNCH) or non-aggressive (LUNCH) manner; in another condition, the same word stems (e.g., TE\_SE) could be completed to create either relationally aggressive (TEASE) or non-aggressive (TENSE) words. We included this latter measure because relational aggression is more common among girls and women than boys and men (e.g., Björkqvist, 1994), and thus, we reasoned that gender threats should *not* necessarily activate this type of aggressive

cognition among men. As expected, gender-threatened men completed more physically aggressive words than did gender-affirmed men and all women; no effects of gender threat emerged on relationally aggressive word completions for either men or women. These results suggest that even in the absence of a provoker, men become primed with physically aggressive thoughts when they experience threats to their manhood.

But do men's aggressive thoughts following gender threats translate into aggressive actions? To answer this question, we asked male participants to put on boxing gloves and punch a padded surface after being videotaped braiding either hair (a feminine, gender-threatening task) or rope (a gender-neutral task). The padded surface contained a sensor that measured the force of men's punches. As we anticipated, men who braided hair punched the pad with more force than men who braided rope, presumably in an effort to prove their manliness to their audience following the emasculating activity (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009, Study 1). In another study, men who braided hair were more likely to choose a subsequent masculine boxing task than a gender-neutral puzzle task while the opposite pattern was found among men who braided rope (Bosson et al., 2009, Study 2). It is possible that men in these studies behaved more aggressively merely because the gender-threatening activity heightened the accessibility of physically aggressive cognitions, as described earlier (Vandello et al., 2008, Study 5). However, the findings from a third study suggest that men's physical aggression served the instrumental function of assuaging men's concerns about their manhood: Men who punched the pad after a gender threat exhibited fewer anxious cognitions on a word completion task relative to men who underwent a gender threat and then did *not* do the masculine punching task (Bosson et al., 2009, Study 3). Considered in conjunction with the findings described previously, these findings suggest that manhood threats are anxiety-provoking events that compel men to restore their lost status via action.



Moreover, aggressive posturing appears to be an effective means of quelling men's anxiety following a gender threat.

### ***Behavioral Scripts Involving Aggression***

The findings summarized above point to the implications of precarious manhood for men's aggressive thoughts and behaviors. We wondered, though, whether occupying a precarious gender status also has implications for men's interpretations of *other men's* aggression. If manhood threats prepare men to behave aggressively, then men in general might recognize a behavioral script in which physical aggression follows logically from public threats to manhood and serves as a means of restoring gender status (e.g., Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Malamuth, Linz, Heavey, Barnes, & Acker, 1995). In turn, this script should influence how men make sense of another man's aggression following a gender threat.

To test this, we presented men and women with a fake police report describing a violent altercation at a bar (Weaver, Vandello, Bosson, & Burnaford, 2010). The attacker was described as either a man or a woman who was flirting with someone at the bar; the victim, who was the same gender as the attacker, approached the attacker and began to taunt him/her publicly about his/her unsuccessful attempts at flirtation. As a crowd looked on and cheered, the attacker retaliated by punching the victim in the face and kicking him/her in the stomach. After reading this story, participants rated the extent to which the attacker's behavior reflected several different external causes (e.g., 'Being provoked'; 'The presence of the crowd') and internal causes ('His/her immaturity'; 'His/her hot temper'). As expected, men interpreted the male attacker's behavior in more external than internal terms, indicating a heightened sensitivity to the situational factors that might pull for aggressive retaliation in a manhood-threatening situation. Conversely, men who rated a female attacker, and women who rated either a male

or female attacker, tended to interpret the attacker's behavior in primarily dispositional terms, reflecting the well-documented, individualistic bias toward assuming that actors' behaviors reflect something enduring about their underlying characters (e.g., Ross, 1977). Thus, although both men and women are equally aware of the precariousness of men's relative to women's gender status (e.g., Vandello et al., 2008), men are more willing to 'excuse' another man's compensatory aggression than are women. This may occur because men presumably have more personal experience than women with situations involving external pressure to prove their gender status.

### ***Job Loss and Mental Health***

The research described thus far has focused primarily on the immediate and/or short-term consequences to men of laboratory-based gender threats. Ideally, however, the precarious manhood hypothesis should add to our understanding of men's real-world experiences. One topic that is ripe for investigation is the link between involuntary job loss and men's mental health. In the wake of the United States' recent economic recession, an estimated 14.8 million Americans were unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). Moreover, three of every four victims of job loss were men (Boushey, 2009). Because employment and the ability to provide financially for family are central components of the male gender role (Blair-Loy, 2003; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Gilmore, 1990; Williams, 1999), we theorized that men who lost jobs might anticipate a loss of manhood. In turn, anticipated threats to gender status might wear on unemployed men, ultimately heightening their vulnerability to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

To test these ideas, we collected data from 816 men and women (37.7% of whom were involuntarily unemployed) who subscribed to the Knowledge Networks Web Panel (KNWP). KNWP subscribers are representative of the national population on demographics including

gender, age, race, and region, based on US Census data (Knowledge Networks, 2010). We asked involuntarily unemployed respondents to estimate the extent to which others saw them as ‘not a real man [woman]’ and ‘less of a man [woman]’ at the time of their job loss, and to rate their anxiety and depression symptoms over the past four weeks. Employed respondents either estimated how others *would* see them (on the ‘not a real man [woman]’ and ‘less of a man [woman]’ items) if they were to lose their job, or else they imagined a hypothetical man or woman who had lost his/her job and rated that person on these items.

As we expected, employed men estimated greater gender status-loss than women when imagining their own hypothetical job loss, and unemployed men (but not unemployed women) overestimated the extent to which they had actually lost gender status in other people’s eyes at the time of their job loss (Michniewicz, Vandello, & Bosson, 2013). Most importantly, however, estimated loss of gender status at the time of job loss was a significant predictor of current depression and anxiety symptoms among unemployed men. That is, to the extent that unemployed men believed that other people doubted their manhood, they reported feeling more depressed and anxious during the past four weeks. Conversely, among unemployed women, there was no association between estimated gender status loss and psychological symptoms. Thus, even though unemployed men were inaccurate about the blow to their manhood represented by job loss, the consequences for their mental health were real: Simply believing that others saw them as ‘not a real man’ predicted anxiety and depression among men who had lost their jobs. Of course, it is likely that factors other than compromised gender status – such as the financial strain of income loss – contributed to the anxiety and depression experienced by unemployed men in this study. However, we find it compelling that, regardless of the ultimate causes of men’s mental health troubles, their symptoms were predicted at least in part by the perception

that they had lost manhood status in others’ eyes.

### ***Individual Differences?***

Thus far, we have discussed precarious manhood as if it is a universal belief, but gender researchers have clearly demonstrated individual differences in gender role ideology (Rudman & Glick, 2008). While those who most strongly endorse and identify with traditional gender norms might seem to be those most vulnerable to the effects of such gender threats, our own research has not borne this out. The effects of manhood threats do not appear to be moderated by individual differences in men’s beliefs about gender. For example, Bosson, Taylor, and Prewitt-Freilino (2006) found that most men reported anxiety at the thought of a public gender role violation, and this effect was not moderated by gender role ideology as measured by Larsen and Long’s (1988) Traditional-Egalitarian Sex Roles Scale, or by gender self-esteem as measured by Luhtanen and Crocker’s (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale. What these findings suggest is that men do not necessarily need to endorse traditional social norms about gender to find challenges to their manhood threatening. Because manhood is a socially conferred status, the danger posed by a manhood threat to an individual man is that *others* will view him as less of a man and he will lose access to the resources and privileges associated with manhood status. Thus, men need not endorse these beliefs personally to be vulnerable to concerns about precarious manhood.

### **AGGRESSION RECONSIDERED**

Physical aggression and violence have been part of human’s heritage for at least as long as fossil records are available (Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Moreover, men consistently exhibit more physical aggression than women (e.g., Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Daly & Wilson, 1988), a pattern that is often

explained in evolutionary terms. Because mammalian females invest more time and physical resources in bearing and rearing offspring, they should be relatively selective when it comes to choosing mates (Trivers, 1972). Accordingly, ancestral men likely experienced greater competition for mating opportunities than women did, and therefore more variance in terms of reproductive success, with some (high status) men mating with multiple female partners and others failing to mate at all (Wilson & Daly, 1992). Since aggression is a means of intrasexual competition that might incapacitate competitors and promote one's ascent within a social status hierarchy, men should have evolved a tendency to use aggression to best other men and gain access to fertile mates.

A great deal of research supports the logic of evolutionary accounts of aggression, and our goal here is not to challenge this powerful explanatory framework. Instead, we propose that the precarious manhood hypothesis can shed light on situational and psychological factors that interact with evolved mechanisms to trigger aggressive behavior. In evolutionary terms, 'status' typically refers to one's position, relative to other men's, in a social hierarchy (e.g., Buss & Shackelford, 1997). Conversely, in work on precarious manhood we define status more abstractly, as the extent to which men are (or believe that they are) perceived by others as 'real men', which speaks more to one's ingroup/outgroup status than it does to one's relative position within an ingroup. Moreover, evolutionary theorists define status threats as conditions or events that undermine men's power, influence, or resources relative to other men, thus rendering them relatively less desirable as mates (e.g., Buss, 1989). In contrast, our work suggests that a wide range of behaviors can call a man's gender status into question, even if these behaviors are irrelevant to men's desirability as mates. For instance, we found that simply braiding a mannequin's hair raises men's concerns about their manhood, and motivates them to compensate via aggressive posturing (Bosson et al., 2009). These

differences between our approaches suggest, at the very least, that if evolution endowed men with tendencies to aggress for status, then cultural and social norms dictate both the meaning of 'status' itself and the behaviors necessary to achieve and maintain it.

In a sense, then, whereas evolutionary-based theories focus on distal features that give rise to aggression, the precarious manhood thesis highlights some of the more proximal features that render aggression likely. Our approach thus contributes to a theoretical framework for understanding features of local environments that can increase intra-male rivalries and aggression. Consider the following findings: male-skewed sex ratios increase the intensity of same-sex competition and risk-taking (Griskevicius et al., 2012; Guttentag & Secord, 1983). Intergroup situations often bring out competitiveness and aggression in men, but not women (Van Vugt, 2009). The presence of other men increases male aggression when mating or status motives are salient (Griskevicius et al., 2009). Men are especially sensitive to interpersonal offenses and status threats in cultural environments that lack formal, legal mechanisms for enforcing the law and redressing grievances (i.e., honor cultures; Cohen & Vandello, 1998). We propose that all of these findings are best understood when considering that men are highly sensitive to potential threats to their manhood status and the resulting need to demonstrate manhood in the face of such threats. In short, evolutionary-based theories and our precarious manhood hypothesis are complementary perspectives that, when considered jointly, can promote a richer understanding of the causes of aggression: Evolutionary theories can help explain why men are more physically aggressive than women in general, but understanding how men experience and react to the precariousness of their gender status can, in turn, illuminate the proximal factors that trigger aggression.

Finally, the precarious manhood hypothesis may explain some classes of physically aggressive acts that seem to fall outside the purview of evolutionary psychology.

For example, consider that young heterosexual men commit most documented acts of physical violence against gay men (Berrill, 1992; Herek, Gillis, Cogan, & Glunt, 1997). It is difficult to make sense of this statistic from an evolutionary perspective: Openly gay men are not intrasexual competitors in the race for access to fertile female mates and, given that gay men are believed to possess primarily feminine traits (Kite & Deaux, 1987), they are relatively unlikely to be perceived as threats to heterosexual men's standing within status hierarchies. Indeed, we can think of no obvious evolutionary logic behind heterosexual men's (versus women's) relative negativity toward gay men (e.g., Herek, 2002). From a precarious manhood viewpoint, however, men's antigay attitudes and aggression make a certain amount of sense. According to our thesis, successful enactment of manhood requires that one repudiate all that is feminine in both the self and others (e.g., Kimmel, 1997); thus, being a 'real man' means rejecting homosexuality (Herek, 1986). Moreover, some work indicates that gender threats heighten heterosexual men's negative reactions toward gay men (Glick, Gangl, Gibb, Klumpner, & Weinberg, 2007), especially when their own heterosexuality is salient (Bosson, Weaver, Caswell, & Burnaford, 2012). These findings are consistent with the notion that men are highly protective of their manhood status because they are aware that this status can be 'lost' via a wide range of behaviors, transgressions, and associations. Antigay attitudes and behaviors thus serve the instrumental function of reminding others that one is a 'real man'. To summarize, work on precarious manhood can both complement evolutionary accounts of men's aggression, and answer lingering questions that are left unaddressed by contemporary evolutionary approaches.

## CONCLUSION

The notion that manhood is a more precarious social status than womanhood is not novel; we

are by no means the first to notice or study this widely held belief. In our work on precarious manhood, our primary goal has been to highlight a structural feature of the male gender role that did not heretofore receive explicit empirical attention within social psychology. Our goals in this chapter, however, were broad: We located our work within historical, disciplinary, and cultural contexts, and we summarized how our findings thus far shed new light on men's reactions to gender threats and gender atypical behaviors, their use of action and aggression, their interpretations of other men's aggression, and their vulnerability to stress and depression. Much work remains to be done, but the research summarized here reflects, we hope, important first steps.

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# Gender-Based Standards of Competence in Parenting and Work Roles

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## INTRODUCTION

All judgment is relative. To describe someone, therefore, as ‘competent’ or ‘incompetent’ has no clear meaning unless the standard or referent used to produce the judgment is specified. Indeed the relativity of language means that we can describe different people (or animals or objects) with the same adjectives, but mean substantially different things by them; our manuscripts, our pets, our children, and our colleagues may all be described as ‘brilliant,’ but the standard of brilliance is defined differently in each case.

In this chapter we examine how standards of competence may be differentially defined depending on the *gender* of the target person being evaluated. Our focus is not on gender differences *per se*, but rather on how stereotypes of men and women affect the manner in which individual men and women are evaluated and perceived. We suggest that standards for judging competence may shift based on gender because of stereotypes about men’s and women’s competence in different domains.

Common gender stereotypes link men to ‘competence’ or ‘agency’, particularly in ‘masculine’ work domains, and women to ‘warmth’ or ‘communion’ (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968; Rudman & Glick, 2008; Spence & Buckner, 2000). These stereotypes function as expectations or standards against which individual men and women are evaluated. Gender stereotypes may lead perceivers to expect that women will be less competent than men in the masculine work domain, and that men will be less competent than women in the feminine home domain. In this sense, standards or expectations for judging competence in masculine work domains are lower for *women* than men, just as standards or expectations for judging parental competence and warmth are lower for *men* than women.

The shifting standards model (Biernat, 2005; Biernat, Manis, & Nelson, 1991) provides the primary framework through which we review evidence about gender and perceived competence throughout this chapter. This model

suggests that gender bias may not be the result of motivated antipathy against women, though such antipathy may certainly figure into workplace and other judgments (e.g., 'hostile sexism,' Glick & Fiske, 1996, 2001). Rather, we suggest that culturally shared gender stereotypes – held by both women and men – affect the way behavior is interpreted and judgments rendered.

The shifting standards model predicts that as a result of stereotype-based shifting standards, men and women might be *evaluated* (i.e., judged) as equally 'competent' or 'warm,' but these judgments may not reflect equivalent *perceptions* (internal representations). For example, a man judged as 'very competent' might be perceived as objectively *better* than a comparably judged woman, because he is evaluated against a higher standard of competence (i.e., in a masculine work domain). Similarly, a woman judged as 'very caring' might be perceived as objectively *more* caring than a comparably judged man, because she is evaluated against a higher standard of caring (i.e., in a feminine domestic domain). The use of shifting gender-based standards may also mean that the same evidence of competence or warmth is evaluated differently in men and women. For example, a male and female employee might each 'come in under budget' on a work project, but this might garner more praise for the woman than the man, because expectations of managerial competence are lower, and more readily surpassed, for women.

In this chapter we review evidence regarding how gender stereotypes influence competence standards in 'masculine' work settings, where men are stereotyped as more competent than women, and in parental roles, where women are stereotyped as more effective than men. Additionally, we address the combination of work and parenting roles by examining the effects of parental status on evaluations of male and female workers, where mothers may face added gender burdens based on assumptions of low commitment to both work and motherhood roles (see Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). We begin this discussion with a review

of the literature regarding standards and social judgment, then turn to a consideration of gender bias in work and family contexts. Examining the ways in which gender colors perceptions in these core life domains is important for understanding stereotyping processes, and for addressing gender inequities in the real world.

## STANDARDS IN JUDGMENT

Much research in psychology has addressed how standards matter for judgment. In general, judgments of individuals may either *assimilate to or be contrasted from* whatever standard is currently accessible. For example, a classic study of self-evaluation relative to salient standards illustrated contrast effects. Prospective job candidates' self-esteem was harmed by upward comparison to a well-dressed competitor standard, but improved by downward comparison to the sloppy competitor standard (Morse & Gergen, 1970).

Judgments of others also may assimilate to accessible standards. In another classic study, participants were first exposed to either positive (e.g., self-confident, independent, adventurous) or negative (e.g., conceited, stubborn, reckless) trait descriptors. Then, in a supposedly unrelated experiment, participants read a description of 'Donald', who 'drove in a demolition derby' and 'planned to learn skydiving', among other things. Donald was evaluated more favorably among individuals initially exposed to positive traits than negative traits, a pattern of assimilation to the 'standard' set by the trait descriptors (Higgins, Rholes, & Jones, 1977).

In general, judgments tend to assimilate to a standard if that standard offers a broad 'interpretation frame' in which the target can be included, but contrast may occur when the standard serves as a 'comparison point' from which the target is excluded (see Mussweiler, 2003; Schwarz & Bless, 1992). Thus, in Higgins et al. (1977), the traits provided an interpretation frame for considering Donald's antics. When the frame was positive ('adventurous'),

Donald was viewed positively. When the frame was negative ('reckless'), Donald was viewed negatively. In this sense, judgments of Donald were assimilated to the accessible standard. However, in Morse and Gergen (1970), the well-dressed and sloppily dressed competitors served as comparison points against which the self either fell short or exceeded, resulting in a contrast effect in self-evaluation.

If gender stereotypes operate as standards, judgments of women and men should either assimilate to them, or show contrast from them. A large literature on stereotyping highlights the former case, assimilation to stereotypes. For example, individual women tend to be judged less competent at leadership than comparable men (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992), and women's contribution to a successful team project is devalued relative to that of men (Heilman & Haynes, 2008). But contrast from gender stereotypes occurs as well, as when a female attorney is judged *more* competent than a comparable male attorney (Abramson, Goldberg, Greenberg, & Abramson, 1977), or when a female softball player receives more praise for getting a hit than a male player who does the same (Biernat & Vescio, 2002).

What determines which pattern occurs? Many factors may contribute, including the extremity and ambiguity of the target person being judged, as well as the specificity of the standard (for a review, see Biernat, 2005). For example, an outstanding female leader may be contrasted from low leadership expectations for her gender, but a mediocre leader, or one whose leadership skills are inconsistent or ambiguous, may be assimilated to the low standard. Additionally, assimilation is more likely to broad standards, such as the general trait of 'leadership', but contrast is more likely from a specific exemplar of a leader. Thus, a target individual's leadership competence may be judged favorably when the construct of 'good leadership' is activated, a pattern likely for men, but leadership judgments may plummet for anyone who is compared to an exemplar of a great leader, such as Abraham Lincoln.

Research on shifting standards has emphasized how the response scale or language used in judgment determines whether assimilation or contrast to gendered expectations occurs (see Biernat, 2005). By response scale, we refer to the fact that judgments can be rendered either in subjective language – the use of adjectives or rating scales that have slippery meaning, depending on the target being described – or in stable, common rule units that do not shift in meaning. For example, the perceived competence of a job applicant can be judged on a subjective numerical rating scale or via adjective choice (e.g., 'she's fairly competent'), or by estimating the applicant's score on a standardized, common-rule test of ability (see Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). In a number of studies, we have demonstrated that contrast effects are more likely when subjective judgments are offered, whereas assimilation to gendered expectations is more likely in objective, standardized, or 'common rule' rating units.

For example, in a resumé evaluation study, participants were asked to judge a male or female applicant for a 'chief of staff' position (perceived as masculine), using either subjective or objective response scales (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). Subjective judgments included ratings of competence and expected job performance, made on response scales ranging from 'not at all competent' to 'very competent'. Objective judgments included competence as indicated by percentage scores and letter grades – units whose meaning does not shift depending on who is described. Female applicants were evaluated more negatively than male applicants on common rule response scales, evidence of assimilation to gender stereotypes, but females were evaluated more positively than male applicants on subjective response scales, a contrast effect (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). The contrast effect likely reflects the use of lower competence standards to evaluate women than men, and the sentiment 'she's great .... for a woman', which is possible when slippery, subjective language is used. At the same time, judgments in objective units reflect the

stereotype-consistent perception that women are less objectively fit for masculine occupations than men.

A second factor affecting whether assimilation to, or contrast from, gendered standards occurs in judgment is the level or nature of the accessible standard. We refer here to the possibility that standards may tap either *minimum* expectations for men and women, or *confirmatory* requirements – the level of evidence necessary for a target individual to document that s/he has a particular attribute. Minimum standards reflect gendered expectations. Therefore, the stereotype that men are more competent than women means that minimum standards of competence are lower for women than men; the stereotype that women are ‘warmer’ than men means that minimum standards of warmth are lower for men than women. Indeed, minimum standards are lower for members of any group stereotyped as deficient in the attribute being judged (Biernat, Ma, & Nario-Redmond, 2008). As noted above, this idea is at the heart of the shifting standards model, and these minimum standards set the stage for *contrast* effects: because women are held to lower competence standards than men, they can more readily meet those standards and be perceived as ‘highly competent ... for a woman’.

However, readers of this chapter may be thinking that the opposite is true – that gender stereotypes regarding competence result in women being held to *higher* standards than men. We suggest that this holds true when *confirmatory* standards are considered. Precisely because of low expectations for women’s competence and men’s warmth, evaluators may require more evidence from women to meet *confirmatory* standards of competence, and for men to meet *confirmatory* standards of warmth. The saying that women need to work ‘twice as hard to be perceived as half as good’ as men reflects this idea (Fernandez, 1982). When confirmatory standards are salient, the stage is set for assimilation effects: members of groups stereotyped as lacking an attribute are required to do more to overcome the group-based

expectation and document that they have the attribute. In this way, competence is more readily diagnosed in men than women, and warmth is more readily diagnosed in women than men.

The distinction between minimum and confirmatory standards was demonstrated in a series of studies in which participants were provided with a list of behaviors and asked to indicate all the behaviors that would be necessary to meet either ‘minimum’ or ‘confirmatory’ standards for a male or female target (Biernat et al., 2008). For example, in one study, participants were provided with a set of 20 behaviors judged moderately aggressive in a pre-test (e.g., ‘interrupts a talkative student in order to make a point’, ‘forces a drunk friend to give up the car keys’). They were asked to check all the behaviors a male or female would have to engage in ‘to give you some inkling or hint that s/he is aggressive’ (the minimum standard), or to ‘confirm that s/he is aggressive’ (the confirmatory standard; Biernat et al., 2008, Study 3). Fewer behaviors checked indicated a lower standard for aggression. It was indeed the case that, for women, minimum standards were lower – fewer behaviors were checked – on the dimensions of aggression and competence. In another study, participants were provided with a set of 20 behaviors judged moderately emotional in a pre-test (e.g., ‘overreacts to small inconveniences’) (Study 2). In this case, minimum standards were lower for men on the dimension of emotionality. That is, men had to do relatively little to be suspected of emotionality, and women had to do relatively little to be suspected of competitiveness and aggression. However, when it came to *confirmatory* standards, the opposite patterns occurred: More evidence was required of women than men to confirm aggression and competitiveness, and more evidence was required of men than women to confirm that they were emotional (Biernat et al., 2008).

This distinction between minimum and confirmatory standards will be examined more fully below as we consider gender-based evaluation of competence in the workplace. This



distinction points to the fact that gender may affect evaluations in complex ways, sometimes producing assimilation and sometimes contrast from stereotyped standards or expectations, depending on the type of judgment or standard that is accessible in a given context.

## SETTING STANDARDS FOR JUDGING COMPETENCE IN WORK SETTINGS

A wealth of literature shows that gender stereotypes affect a variety of workplace judgments and decisions, primarily in the direction of assimilation to stereotypes. In stereotypically masculine occupations, women are less likely than men to (1) be hired and promoted (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001; Davison & Burke, 2000; Fiske & Lee, 2008; Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007; Levin, Rouwenhorst, & Trinsko, 2005; Lyness & Judiesch, 1999; Rudman & Glick, 1999; Steinpreis, Anders, & Ritzke, 1999); (2) receive favorable performance appraisals and high salaries (Biernat, Fuegen, Kobrynowicz, 2010; Castilla, 2008; Joshi, Liao, & Jackson, 2006; Lyness and Heilman, 2006; Swim & Sanna, 1996); and (3) be judged as competent leaders (Biernat, Crandall, Young, Kobrynowicz, & Halpin, 1998; Boldry, Wood, & Kashy, 2001; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992; Haslam & Ryan, 2008). The focus of this section is on the ways minimum and confirmatory standards affect these decisions.

In the résumé study described earlier (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997), a female job applicant was judged to have performed worse than a male applicant on a standardized ability test, a stereotype assimilation effect. However, the female was judged subjectively better than the male. In that same study, participants indicated either the number of job-relevant skills they would require of the applicant before feeling that he or she 'meets the minimum standard' to be successful in the position or to indicate the number of job-relevant skills they would require to decide that the applicant 'has the ability' to perform the job. Though fewer skills were required of

a female than male applicant to meet the minimum standard (a contrast effect), more skills were required of a female to *confirm* that she had ability (an assimilation effect). Furthermore, though the female applicant needed more job-relevant skills to meet the confirmatory than minimum standard, the male applicant did not. This latter finding suggests that lower minimum and higher confirmatory standards exist only for members of groups stereotyped as deficient on an attribute (in this case, job-related competence). For members of groups stereotyped as possessing an attribute (males and competence), suspicion equals confirmation (Biernat et al., 2008).

A subsequent study was designed to map minimum and confirmatory standards onto decisions made in the hiring process. Biernat and Fuegen (2001) hypothesized that minimum standards may be relevant when a decision-maker determines which job applicants meet initial screening criteria (as in the creation of a shortlist), and confirmatory standards may be relevant when the decision-maker determines whom to hire. If lower minimum and higher confirmatory standards exist only for members of groups stereotyped as deficient on an attribute, then women will be more likely to make the shortlist (by meeting low expectations), but be less likely to be hired. Students role-played the position of a manager in charge of evaluating job applicants. They viewed a résumé (with a female or male name) and indicated either the level of performance that would indicate that the applicant should be placed on the shortlist (a minimum standard) or the level of performance that would indicate that the applicant should be hired (a confirmatory standard). Participants required a lower test score to place a woman on the shortlist than to hire her. However, for the male applicant, the same test score needed to be shortlisted was sufficient to be hired, indicating that suspicion equaled confirmation. Standards predicted decisions in that female applicants were more likely to be shortlisted than hired.

Burgess and Borgida (1999) suggest that descriptive stereotypes (i.e., the characteristics

men and women are believed to have) result in hiring discrimination when women are assimilated to female stereotypes. Prescriptive stereotypes (i.e., the characteristics men and women *should* have) result in disparate treatment on the job when women are derogated because they violate gender role prescriptions for how they ought to behave. If women's work performance in a stereotypically masculine job is expected to be poor, very little evidence of poor behavior may be needed before confirming that a particular woman is incompetent. On the other hand, men will readily meet minimum incompetence standards (because incompetence is not expected), though more evidence of incompetence will be tolerated from a particular man before incompetence is confirmed.

To test how shifting standards affect judgments of job-related incompetence, Biernat, Fuegen, and Kobrynowicz (2010) presented undergraduate participants with a brief (mostly negative) performance summary for a trainee and asked them to record information about the trainee's performance in either 'informal notes' or a 'formal performance log'. The 'informal notes' were for the participants' eyes only and relatively inconsequential; the 'formal performance log' was a permanent record with serious consequences for the trainee's future. We expected that informal notes would instantiate minimum standards, and the formal performance log would instantiate confirmatory standards. We found that fewer negative behaviors were recorded in the formal log than in the informal notes only when the trainee was male. When the trainee was female, similar numbers of negative behaviors was recorded in each record. In other words, the amount of evidence of poor behavior needed to *suspect* incompetence in the female trainee equaled the amount of evidence needed to *confirm* incompetence. The more negative behaviors recorded in either record, the more likely the trainee was fired. These results demonstrate that gender-based standards affect not only inferences of competence (related to hiring decisions) but also inferences of *incompetence* (related to

firing decisions). Taken together, the studies suggest that a woman must not only work harder than a man to demonstrate that she is sufficiently competent to be hired in a position, but she is also allowed fewer mistakes than a man before others conclude that she is incompetent.

These studies also show that context affects standards. For example, the setting of equivalent minimum and confirmatory standards of incompetence for women was evident in a stereotypically masculine position (Executive Chief of Staff) where it was expected, but there was no evidence that confirmatory standards of incompetence were more lenient than minimum standards for women in a stereotypically feminine position (Executive Secretary). Other studies have revealed that manipulations of job type did not affect standards or decisions (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001; Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997). Researchers who have manipulated task stereotypicality have also not found differences (e.g., Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Taynor & Deaux, 1975), perhaps because 'male' operates as a general status characteristic that implies competence across a wide variety of domains, reducing any advantage that might accrue to women in 'feminine' contexts (e.g., see Foschi, 2000; Ridgeway & Bourg, 2004). While women experience a 'glass ceiling' as they attempt to advance in male-dominated occupations, men may experience a 'glass escalator' in stereotypically feminine occupations (e.g., nursing education; Williams, 1992). Recent research does suggest that men may take a hit when they succeed in feminine occupations (e.g., Employee Relations Counselor), being perceived as more 'wimpy' and less worthy of respect relative to women who succeed in these occupations or men who succeed in masculine occupations (Heilman & Wallen, 2010). But additional research is needed to clarify when contextual factors like occupational sex-typing affect the tendency to shift judgment standards.

The setting of higher confirmatory standards of competence for women than men is consistent with research on double standards

for competence derived from expectation states theory (Foddy & Smithson, 1989; Foschi, 1989, 2000; Foschi & Foddy, 1988). Foschi (2000) defines standards as 'norms defining requirements for the inference of an attribute, such as the level of performance considered *necessary to conclude* that a person is competent' (p. 22; emphasis added), and highlights the operation of double standards: more evidence of an attribute is needed from members of low-status groups (e.g., women) than members of high-status groups (e.g., men) to confirm its presence, particularly when the task is associated with attributes of the high-status group. The key difference between Foschi's perspective and the shifting standards model lies in the level of ability being assessed. Double standards research addresses confirmatory standards (i.e., the level of performance considered necessary to conclude that a person is competent), whereas shifting standards addresses how minimum standards differ from confirmatory standards (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997).

Heilman (1983, 2001) has argued that the greater the perceived 'lack of fit' between the characteristics thought to describe women and the attributes deemed necessary for success in a (male-dominated) job, the greater the expectation that women's performance will be poor. Because expectations guide what we notice, attend to, and remember, they affect performance evaluations. For example, if a male construction foreman regards physical strength as necessary for being a successful construction worker, and he regards women as dainty, he is likely to perceive that women don't 'fit' the job. His expectation is that women will not be good construction workers. If a woman makes a mistake (e.g., uses the wrong tool), the foreman is likely to remember this mistake. Because he expects her performance to be poor, he may assign her less desirable tasks in the future, transfer her to another crew, or terminate her employment (Struthers, Weiner, & Allred, 1998).

Consistent with the lack of fit model, research shows that biased evaluations of

women's performance are more common in roles occupied predominately by men (Eagly et al., 1992; Kanter, 1977; Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari 2011). In their analysis of performance ratings for middle- and senior-level managers in a financial services corporation (a male-dominated industry), Lyness and Heilman (2006) found that for women to be promoted, they needed to demonstrate a higher level of performance than men. Similarly, in the domain of finance law, female attorneys may be required to be more spectacular than male attorneys to be on the track to partnership (Biernat, Tocci, & Williams, 2012). In both cases, women need to meet a stricter confirmatory standard for competence than do men.

### **Implications**

The likelihood that managers will apply shifting standards when judging applicants' or employees' competence (or incompetence) depends on several factors. Persons are most likely to shift standards when a target's performance is ambiguous (i.e., neither stellar nor abysmal) (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001; Biernat et al., 2010; see also Foschi, 1996, Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000) and when the measures designed to assess performance are vague (e.g., is the applicant a 'team player'?) (Gupta, Jenkins, & Beehr, 1983; Heilman & Haynes, 2008; Nieva & Gutek, 1980; Sessa, 2001). Stereotypes are also more likely to influence judgment when decision-makers are not held accountable (Castilla, 2008; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999), and when the work group lacks diversity (Joshi et al., 2006; Kanter, 1977). Performance measures that are precise (e.g., number of billable hours) and a performance appraisal system that makes decision-makers accountable for recruiting and retaining women are factors that are likely to lessen the use of gender-based standards of workplace competence.

When gender stereotypes influence judgments of workplace competence, stricter confirmatory standards for women outweigh lenient minimum standards. That is, the benefit of being held to more lenient minimum

standards for making the shortlist is outweighed by stricter confirmatory standards for hiring. Similarly, the benefit of being praised for good performance (a non-zero sum behavior) is outweighed by being passed over for a coveted promotion (a zero sum behavior) (Biernat & Vescio, 2002). When gender stereotypes influence judgments of incompetence, the benefit of a few mistakes being ignored is outweighed by a swift confirmation of inability. Persons need not be able to articulate different standards in order to apply them (Foschi, 2000). Even if they are aware of applying different standards, judges may be motivated to hide the true reasons behind their judgments (Norton, Vandello, & Darley, 2004). For example, if a male manager must decide between a male applicant with superior experience and a female applicant with superior education, he may justify his preference for the male by reasoning that experience is more important than education (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005). Because many hiring managers do not objectively combine predictors when choosing among applicants, differential weighting of qualifications is likely to occur.

In the next section, we examine how gender-based standards affect judgments in another important role: parenting. Because women are stereotyped as 'warmer' than men (Bakan, 1966; Eagly, 1987; Rosenkrantz et al., 1968; Rudman & Glick, 2008; Spence & Buckner, 2000), standards for judging warmth and general competence in parenting are *lower* for men than women. We also examine how mothers' and fathers' decisions regarding how to balance employee and parenting roles affect judgments of their effectiveness as parents.

## JUDGING COMPETENCE AND WARMTH IN PARENTING

When women and men become parents, they are perceived as less competent (Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004) but warmer (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). Though mothers

and fathers are both perceived as nurturing and attentive, being 'willing to always be there and to do anything for the children' is a characteristic more often attributed to a good mother than a good father (Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1997; see also Russo, 1976; Williams, 2001). Indeed, the word 'mom' is more quickly associated with parenting images (e.g., stroller) than is the word 'dad', while 'dad' is more readily associated with professional images (e.g., briefcase) (Park, Smith, & Correll, 2010). Because of gender stereotypes, the same behavior (e.g., attending a parent-teacher conference) may be judged as highly nurturing in a father ('for a father, he's really involved') but only moderately nurturing in a mother. When students were asked to translate subjective descriptions of parenting effectiveness (e.g., being a 'very good' or 'all right' parent) into objective judgments (i.e., how many parenting behaviors does this individual perform?), mothers were judged to perform *more* caregiving behaviors than fathers (Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1997). Thus, gender stereotypes led students to evaluate the parenting effectiveness of mothers and fathers relative to different standards. In this case, lower standards for judging men meant that fathers did not need to do as much as mothers to be judged either a 'very good' or 'all right' parent.

Paid employment differentially affects judgments of mothers' and fathers' parental effectiveness. In one study, participants estimated the frequency with which stay-at-home and employed mothers and fathers performed various childcare behaviors (objective estimate), and they rated their effectiveness as parents (subjective judgment) (Bridges, Etaugh, & Barnes-Farrell, 2002). Consistent with Kobrynowicz and Biernat (1997), an employed mother was judged to provide more physical care than an employed father, though an employed father was regarded as a better parent than an employed mother. Additionally, a stay-at-home mother was judged to perform more physical and emotional caregiving than a stay-at-home-father, but was judged equally effective at parenting.

Though children approve of both full-time employed mothers and fathers, they are less accepting of stay-at-home fathers than stay-at-home mothers (Sinno & Killen, 2009). Taken together, these studies suggest that mothers are assumed to be primarily responsible for the care of children, and fathers are assumed to be primarily responsible for earning an income.

Parents' decisions regarding how to balance work and family roles also affect judgments of their warmth and competence. Employed mothers are judged less warm than stay-at-home mothers (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Bridges & Orza, 1992; Etaugh & Folger, 1998; Riedle, 1991). Mothers who were described as temporarily leaving their jobs were judged warmer than mothers who immediately returned to work after having a baby (Coleman & Franiuk, 2011). Perceptions of fathers' warmth did not decrease when they immediately returned to work. However, fathers who stayed at home were judged less *competent* than fathers who immediately returned to work or who took parental leave. Judgments of mothers' competence were not similarly affected. Thus a mother's decision regarding how to balance work and family roles affected perceptions of her *warmth* but not competence; a father's decision regarding how to balance these roles affected perceptions of his *competence* but not warmth. Parents who violated gender roles by either returning to work immediately after having a child (women) or by staying home (men) were perceived negatively (though see Bosak, Sczesny, and Eagly (2008) for evidence that stay-at-home fathers are judged as equal in warmth to stay-at-home mothers).

The hours an employee works – whether part time, full time, or overtime – affect judgments of professional and caregiving behavior (Park, Smith, & Correll, 2008). The more hours a parent worked outside the home, the more professional behaviors (e.g., being asked to lead an important project) he or she was judged to do. These estimates were similar for mothers and fathers, consistent

with social role theory (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000), but gender stereotypes were manifested in estimates of caregiving behavior. A mother was judged to engage in more caregiving behaviors (e.g., comforting a hurt child) than a father, regardless of the number of hours per week she was employed. Like fathers, mothers were expected to make greater contributions at work as their work hours increased. However, only mothers were expected to assume the majority of childcare duties.

### **Implications**

This research shows that judgments of parents' competence and warmth are affected by gender-based standards. Because men are held to lower standards of parenting effectiveness than women, they need not do as much as mothers to be deemed good parents. The data are consistent with the idea that employed mothers work a 'second shift' at home (Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Judgments of mothers' and fathers' effectiveness as parents were generally unaffected by the participant's gender (Bridges et al., 2002; Kobryniewicz & Biernat, 1997; Park et al., 2008), suggesting that men and women alike believe that caregiving is more central to women's than men's lives (Park et al., 2010).

Research on how gender stereotypes affect judgments of parenting effectiveness has important implications for judgments of parents' work-related competence. The traits thought to characterize a 'good mother' (e.g., warm, caring, nurturing) are often inconsistent with the traits thought to characterize a good employee (e.g., competitive, independent, aggressive) (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011; Schein, 1973, 2001). Employers may assume that mothers are responsible for picking up a sick child from school and that they are consequently less available and less committed to the employee role. If mothers are assumed to be less committed to the employer role than fathers, they may be held to higher job-related competence standards than fathers.



## JUDGING THE WORKPLACE COMPETENCE OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS

There is considerable evidence that mothers hit a 'maternal wall' at work (Crosby, Williams, & Biernat, 2004). This bias is evident at the earliest stages of the transition to parenthood: Even pregnant women are judged negatively, relative to non-pregnant women (Bragger, Kutcher, Morgan, & Firth, 2002; Cunningham & Macan, 2007; Halpert, Wilson, & Hickman, 1993; Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, & Kazama, 2007; Masser, Grass, & Nesci, 2007). The 'maternal wall' is evident in audit studies in which employers are mailed fake résumés (Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007; Firth, 1982) and in laboratory studies in which students role-play hiring managers (Cuddy et al., 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004; Heilman & Okimoto, 2008). For example, Firth (1982) mailed job applications to several accounting firms in which the applicant's gender and parental status were manipulated. Motherhood decreased the likelihood that a female applicant was contacted by a potential employer, but fatherhood had no effect on a male applicant's likelihood of being contacted. Correll et al. (2007) mailed same-sex pairs of fictitious résumés to employers advertising marketing positions. A mother received half as many callbacks as a woman without children.

Research shows that gender stereotypes affect judgments of mothers' and fathers' work-related competence. Consistent with predictions derived from the stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), Cuddy et al. (2004) found that an employed mother was judged more warm than competent, though an employed father was judged equally warm and competent. The more competent an employee was rated, the more often he or she was requested, promoted, and trained (controlling for warmth). However, warmth ratings were not correlated with these outcomes when controlling for competence. Consistent with the results of audit studies (Correll et al., 2007; Firth,

1982), a mother was requested and recommended less than was a woman without children, though the father and the man without children were equally preferred. Other research shows that a mother seeking a promotion in a traditionally male-dominated occupation was expected to be less competent and was less likely to be recommended for further consideration than a woman without children, though parental status had no effect on competence judgments or recommendations of men (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008). Consistent with predictions derived from the lack of fit model (Heilman, 1983, 2001), lower ratings of competence and agency (i.e., independence, leadership, power seeking) mediated the relationship between motherhood and recommendations.

Although mothers are held to higher standards for job-related competence than women without children and fathers, fathers are held to *lower* standards than men without children. Undergraduate participants required a higher level of ability and a greater time commitment from a mother than a father in order to hire the applicant as an attorney (Fuegen et al., 2004), though a father was held to lower ability and time commitment standards than a non-parent male applicant (see Fuegen & Endicott [2010] for similar results from a sample of attorneys; see Güngör & Biernat [2009] for evidence of straightforward gender bias rather than 'maternal wall' bias in a blue-collar job). Ironically, the less time commitment required of a father, the more likely he was to be hired. Perceived competence was positively correlated with hiring decisions for both the mother and the father, though perceived warmth predicted hiring of only the father. Consistent with Cuddy et al. (2004) and Heilman and Okimoto (2008), a mother was less likely to be promoted than a woman without children, though parenthood did not harm a man's chance of being promoted.

Discrimination in terms of hiring and promotion has obvious implications for the gender gap in wages. This gap is greater between mothers and fathers than between

women and men without children (Waldfogel, 1997). Parenthood decreases women's earnings, while at the same time increases men's earnings. Mothers, on average, suffer a 7% wage penalty per child (Budig & England, 2001). Controlling for marital status, human capital variables (e.g., experience, number of breaks in employment), and job characteristics (e.g., part-time, percentage of females in occupation), reduces this penalty by only one-third. The remainder of the gap may reflect discrimination against mothers and/or differences in productivity between mothers and non-mothers (perhaps due to shouldering the bulk of childcare and household chores) (Biernat & Wortman, 1991; Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Park et al., 2008). By contrast, fathers experience, on average, a 6% wage *increase* relative to men without children (Hodges & Budig, 2010; see also Lundberg and Rose [2000] for a similar estimate; see Baumle [2009] for evidence of a 14–16% bonus for fathers). This bonus remains even after taking into account human capital variables and hours worked. Being married accounted for half the wage bonus, presumably because of wives' investment in homemaking (independent of hours of paid work) (Biernat & Wortman, 1991; Park et al., 2008). The fatherhood bonus was largest among married white men in professional or managerial careers who resided in households with a traditional division of labor (Hodges & Budig, 2010).

One group of women who do not appear to suffer a wage penalty when having children is lesbian mothers. Baumle (2009) reported that lesbian mothers enjoyed a 20% *increase*, on average, in earnings relative to lesbian women without children. Though the reason for this difference is unclear, one possibility is that lesbians may be less likely to stay at home following the birth or adoption of a child than heterosexual mothers (who may be married to a high-earning spouse who can bear the costs associated with taking leave; Baumle, 2009). Research shows that lesbian women are stereotyped as more masculine and less feminine than heterosexual women

(Blashill & Powlishta, 2009), making it likely that they are held to different standards than heterosexual women.

These data comport with the argument that differences in professional achievement between men and women may reflect descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about parenting roles more than straightforward gender bias (Ceci & Williams, 2011; Ginther & Kahn, 2009; Judge & Livingston, 2008; Mason & Goulden, 2004). Researchers have argued that the rigid structure of the American workplace (designed to accommodate the needs of a single male breadwinner with a homemaker wife) forces mothers to choose between employment and caregiving (Hochschild & Machung, 1989; Mason & Goulden, 2004; Williams, 2001). Having young children lowered women's chances of securing a tenure-track position in the natural, physical, and social sciences, while the presence of young children had no effect on men's chances (Ginther & Kahn, 2009; Mason & Goulden, 2004). While untenured women having children are expected to make their most significant intellectual achievement contemporaneously with their most important physical and emotional achievement, the same is not expected of men (Ceci & Williams, 2011). Thus, gender differences in professional achievement are inextricably bound with societal expectations and biological necessity surrounding caregiving.

## Implications

Considerable research demonstrates that when women become parents, observers' perceptions of their job-related competence worsen. The same is not true of men who become parents. Though women gain in perceived warmth when they become parents (Cuddy et al., 2004), warmth does not help them at work (Cuddy et al., 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004). Some researchers have argued that the workplace itself is gendered (e.g., Rapoport, Bailyn, Fletcher, & Pruitt, 2002). The 'ideal worker' is someone who works 40 or more hours per week consistently for 40 years

without taking time off (Bailyn, 1993; Williams, 2001). This pattern of working is inconsistent with the preferred work patterns of many mothers who periodically leave the workforce or reduce their work hours to care for children. Fathers are more likely than mothers to conform to the ideal worker norm, thus facilitating the association between 'dad' and the workplace (Park et al., 2010). Bailyn (1993) has argued that it is wrong to assume that work roles engage the exclusive commitment of those who occupy them. It is only when assumptions about work-related competence and commitment are disentangled from gender stereotypes about parenting roles that the 'maternal wall' will be dismantled.

## THE ROLE OF THE EVALUATOR'S GENDER

Studies investigating how gender stereotypes affect judgments of parents' job-related competence generally show that the judge's gender does not moderate results. For example, both women and men judge mothers as deficient in job-related competence compared to fathers (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; Correll et al., 2007; Cuddy et al., 2004; Firth, 1982; Fuegen et al., 2004; Riggs, 2005) and expect women to assume the majority of caregiving responsibilities, regardless of the number of hours worked outside the home (Park et al., 2008). When participant gender differences have been found (Bridges & Etaugh, 1995; Coleman & Franiuk, 2011; Etaugh & Kasley, 1995; Halpert et al., 1993), they often indicate that women hold more favorable attitudes than men toward mothers who adopt non-traditional gender roles. However, women also penalize mothers who are depicted as high in work-related competence by judging them unlikable (Benard & Correll, 2010). Similarly, research on gender-based standards of competence in parenting and work roles shows that women sometimes judge other women more harshly than do men (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001). In that study,

only women set lower standards for placing a woman (than a man) on the shortlist but higher standards for hiring her. Furthermore, only women were unlikely to hire women. Why were women harsher on women, even though they are typically less likely than men to stereotype other women (e.g., Koenig et al. 2011)? Though there is no definitive explanation, these results are consistent with the explanation that women dislike other women they perceive as self-promoting (Rudman, 1998) or successful (Parks-Stamm, Heilman, & Hearn, 2008), particularly when the level of success is perceived as unattainable.

Shifting standards research shows that sometimes women judge the same as men do (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1997), sometimes favor women over men (Biernat et al., 2010), and sometimes stereotype men but not other women (Biernat et al., 2008). Clearly, additional research is needed to delineate the conditions in which participant gender affects standard-setting in these domains. Nevertheless, it is clear from this research that even women – who tend to endorse more egalitarian gender roles – still shift standards.

## CONCLUSION

Our goal in this chapter was to review the literature on gender and perceived competence in workplace and parenting roles by considering the impact of gender-based judgment standards. All judgments are made relative to some standard, and we have suggested that gender and its associated stereotypes function in this manner, providing expectations against which individual women and men are evaluated. Because standards differ for men and women in stereotyped domains, a variety of judgment consequences are possible, ranging from assimilation to stereotypes (in common rule judgments, in the setting of confirmatory standards) to contrast from stereotypes (in subjective judgments, as based on the use of minimum standards).

This complexity in the effects of gender on evaluation is reflected in the literature reviewed throughout this chapter. In our own work, we have demonstrated that gender-based expectations can produce either stringency or leniency, positivity or negativity, in the evaluation of women in masculine work domains. For example, female applicants may be evaluated more favorably than men in subjective judgments but less favorably when judgments are made in objective rating units (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997); women may be more likely to be shortlisted for jobs (based on low minimum standards) but less likely to be hired than comparable men (based on confirmatory standards; Biernat & Fuegen, 2001); and evidence of incompetence in the workplace is more likely to be noted in *formal*, *consequential* records for women than men, but more likely to be noted in *informal* records for men than women (Biernat et al., 2010). With regard to parenting, mothers and fathers are described in equivalently favorable terms, but fathers must do objectively less parenting work to earn those labels (Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1997). Mothers in the workplace seem to fare poorly overall, as they are held to high standards for inferring job-related competence, relative to fathers and to women and men without children (Fuegen et al., 2004).

Others have noted similar patterns of complexity. For example, women managers overall received lower performance ratings than men, but promoted women received *higher* ratings than promoted men (Lyness & Heilman, 2006); employed mothers were judged to provide more physical care of children than employed fathers, though fathers were nonetheless judged to be subjectively better parents (Bridges et al., 2002). These findings suggest that gender stereotypes are at play not only in straightforward assimilation effects, as when women are judged less competent at work and men as less good at parenting, but potentially in null or contrastive patterns as well. And while evidence of contrast may make it seem as though gender stereotypes have been overcome – female

applicants make the shortlist; men are judged ‘great parents’ – these effects may not reflect perceivers’ underlying views. That the shortlisted female applicants are less likely to be hired, or that the mother is still the preferred childcare provider suggests that gender stereotypes are operative, providing shifting standards against which individuals are evaluated.

The implications of these processes for the ‘real world’ are clear. Both at work and in the home, women and men may be subject to the vagaries of differential gender-based standards. When being evaluated on stereotyped dimensions, being held to low minimum standards may be just as consequential as being held to high confirmatory standards, as these low standards are patronizing in nature (see Biernat, 2005; Pettigrew & Martin, 1987). We call to mind the local newspaper stories published every Father’s Day, which seem to celebrate fathers who occasionally take their children to the park as ‘fabulous’ parents. The consequences of gender-based standards include hiring, salary, promotion, and the granting of other resources and benefits. One understudied example is parental leave policies at work. Because mothers are assumed to be primary caregivers, they may be expected to take maternity leave; because fathers are assumed to be breadwinners, paternity leave is less likely to be standard practice (see Ray, Gornick, & Schmitt, 2009; Williams & Segal, 2003). Stigmatization may occur when either expectation is violated.

Demographic and attitudinal trends clearly indicate improvement in the status of women and in attitudes and beliefs about gender-based equality (see Eagly & Carli, 2007 for a review). Indeed, we are optimistic that gender stereotypes will play a smaller and smaller role over time in work and home settings. Still, we suggest that gender is a powerful social category, tied to both biology and culture (Wood & Eagly, 2010), which operates as a lens through which individual women and men are viewed, scrutinized, and evaluated.

The effects of gender stereotypes are complex, and further research is needed to

understand the precise conditions under which different patterns of gender bias will emerge. Our literature review was primarily guided by the shifting standards model, which describes a neutral, relatively 'cold' judgment context. But motivational forces figure into judgment processes as well, and these should be better integrated with the shifting standards perspective. For example, when motivated by hostile bias or sense of personal or group threat, stereotypes may be relied on more strongly (e.g., Sinclair & Kunda, 2000). When one's goals include discovering the weaknesses of others, the tendency to shift standards may increase (Vescio, Gervais, Snyder, & Hoover, 2005). Self-enhancement and comprehension goals may increase the tendency to stereotype (and perhaps to shift standards), whereas motivations to avoid prejudice may reduce them (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). Contextual factors, including local norms, may also contribute to the pattern of gender bias that emerges. These may either serve to justify or suppress gender-based judgment (see Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Recognizing these myriad factors in any given context is difficult, but important, as researchers seek to understand stereotyping effects from a theoretical perspective and apply them to real world contexts in which men and women face gender inequities.

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# Gendering the Psychology of Aging

Susan Kemper

## INTRODUCTION

Gender is of broad interest in psychology as well as in gerontology, yet it is rarely addressed in the psychology of aging. In *The Handbook of the Psychology of Aging*, Huyck (1990) contributed a chapter on gender to the 3rd edition and Sinnott and Shifren (2001) contributed a chapter on gender to the 5th edition, but gender was not addressed in other editions; indeed, *gender* does not even appear in the topic indices of most editions. I address this neglect by summarizing what is known about how the psychologies of aging and gender intersect. Many questions remain unresolved: there is an insufficiency of available data in some areas, and integrative analyses and meta-analytic investigations have not kept pace with the rapid growth of sampling techniques, experimental findings, and quantitative models of intra- and inter-individual change in other areas. Much of the 'psychology of aging' is indeed a 'psychology of aging women', but just how much? And does it matter? I attempt to answer the first question by reviewing how gender influences biological, cognitive, and neurological patterns of aging, and the second by reviewing how gender influences patterns of well-being and social relations including caregiving. I conclude

with a consideration of the intersection of ageism and sexism on attitudes toward older individuals.

## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PATTERNS OF AGING

Gender affects how we age, influencing demographic patterns of mortality and morbidity. The biological basis of gendered patterns of aging is in some dispute, as is the role of social biases, particularly those influencing health assessments by women and by their physicians.

### *Demography*

During the 20th century, average life expectancy increased from approximately 47 years in 1900 to approximately 77 years in 2000. This unprecedented 30-year gain is not expected to continue because it resulted from declines in fertility and the increased survival of infants and children due to the development of antibiotics and public health improvements. Future increases in life expectancy will require eliminating heart disease, cancer, stroke, and other age-associated diseases (Olshansky, Hayflick, & Carnes, 2002).

Coupled with the post-war Baby Boom and other changes to patterns of fertility and mortality, this increase in life expectancy has resulted in a reshaping of the population, from one in which there were many more children and young adults than middle-aged and older adults to one in which there are approximately equal numbers at all ages. A further consequence of these demographic trends is that older age groups are dominated by females (Gist & Hetzel, 2004; Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics [FORUM], 2010), in part because women tend to live longer than men (Barford, Dorling, Davey Smith, & Shaw, 2006). As a result of the mortality gap, older women are more likely to be widowed than older men (for those over 65: 42% of women vs 14% of men), to live alone (40% vs 19%), and to live in poverty (12% vs 7%) (FORUM, 2010).

### **Body**

Women's advantage in longevity is offset by a disadvantage in health, the so-called mortality-morbidity paradox (Oksuzyan, Juel, Vaupel, & Christensen, 2008). Austad (2006) reviewed five hypotheses to account for women's longevity advantage: (1) women have a lower incidence of disease due to a 'more active' immune system; (2) estrogen exerts a protective effect on cellular systems; (3) having homogametic sex chromosomes (e.g., having two X chromosomes) is less likely to result in the expression of deleterious alleles on either X chromosome; (4) women have reduced activity of growth hormones; and (5) the rate of oxidative stress production is lower in women. All of the hypotheses were rejected by Austad based on his cross-species comparison of survival patterns.

### **Chronic Conditions**

Even though a biological explanation for women's longevity advantage is lacking, it is well established that older women are more likely to experience chronic health conditions that result in disabilities, whereas older men are more likely to have heart disease,

the leading cause of mortality among older adults (Crimmins, Kim, & Sole-Auro, 2011). Differential rates of mortality and morbidity for women and men contribute to another finding: women are more likely to experience more years of life coping with disabilities and chronic diseases (Crimmins, Kim, & Hagedorn, 2002). Women can expect to live longer with heart disease, arthritis, asthma and other lung diseases, and diabetes than men. These gender differences may arise from a cumulative pattern of poor health behaviors among men, including smoking, obesity, and lack of medical care and treatment.

### **Disablement**

Verbrugge (1989; Verbrugge & Jette, 1994) has argued for a pathway model of disablement that runs from daily symptoms, to periodic diseases and injuries, to long-term limitations, to supervised care by a physician, to increasingly frequent hospitalization, and finally to death. She argues that gender differences arise from the rate at which women and men traverse this pathway, reflecting risk factors such as environmental and occupational hazards, interventions such as physical and interpersonal supports that may mitigate functional limitations and exacerbators such as architectural barriers or societal attitudes toward those with disabilities that influence self-care and help-seeking behaviors. Ruiz and Verbrugge (1997) have argued that gender biases also affect women's health: Less attention may be paid (by women themselves or their physicians) to chronic, non-fatal conditions such as arthritis; diagnostic criteria, treatment protocols, and medical interventions may be geared toward life-threatening conditions such as heart disease, rather than chronic conditions, and the provision of health services may be delayed or reduced because women are assumed to be 'healthier' than men.

Conversely, Courtenay (2000) suggests that men assume they are 'healthier' than women. Although men are more likely to engage in a variety of behaviors that increase their risk of disease, injury, and death, they believe that



they are the 'stronger sex' for whom health and safety are irrelevant. Therefore, men avoid routine physician visits, embrace risky sports, and ignore advice to take preventative measures such as using sunscreen. She argues that 'by dismissing their health needs and taking risks, men legitimize themselves as the "stronger" sex' (p. 1397).

## **Mind**

The risk of depression is commonly assumed to increase with age, especially among women (Nolen-Hoeksema, Larsen, & Grayson, 1999). This assumption may not be valid. Gatz, Kasl-Godley, and Karel (1996) found no evidence that adults 70 years and older were more likely to be depressed than those between 20 and 54 years of age; Patten (2000) reports higher depression rates among younger than older adults. Other studies have found that older women tend to be less depressed than younger ones (Akiyama & Antonucci, 2002; Kessler, Gilman, Thornton, & Kendler, 2004). The apparent associations of age and gender with depression may arise from the cumulative effects of other risk factors, including chronic medical conditions, disabilities, lack of social supports, and financial problems, all of which contribute to increased risk of depression (Antonucci et al., 2002). Gender- and age-biases in the ascertainment, diagnostic criteria, and symptomology of depression may also contribute to the assumption that older women are at increased risk for depression.

Loneliness, both social and emotional, has also been assumed to increase with age, although other studies document a decrease in loneliness after middle age (Cacioppo, Hawkey, & Thisted, 2010) or fail to find an age-related increase in loneliness (Gerstorf, Smith, & Baltes, 2006). Gender differences in loneliness have also been reported, although such gender differences are small and inconsistent (Hawkey et al., 2008).

## **Cognition**

Older adults process information more slowly than young adults, have increased difficulty

learning and retaining new information and recalling old information, and encounter problems with 'executive functions' involved in planning, reasoning, response inhibition, and shifting attention (Park et al., 1996). These cognitive processing limitations affect not only how older adults perform on basic assessments of intelligence but also affect their social interactions, oral and written communication, their ability to live independently, and the skills required to manage finances, maintain a household, drive to the doctor's office or the pharmacy, or even cross a busy street.

Three general hypotheses have been put forth to account for these observed patterns of age-related cognitive decline: (1) Horn, Donaldson, and Engstrom (1981) distinguished fluid intelligence from crystallized intelligence and suggested that crystallized intelligence remains stable over the lifespan whereas fluid intelligence declines. There is general support for this model from studies demonstrating that measures of crystallized intelligence such as vocabulary and general knowledge show little decline during mid- and late-life whereas measures of fluid intelligence such as processing speed and problem-solving begin to decline in mid-life. (2) Salthouse (1996) claims that the age-related decline in processing speed is fundamental, affecting both qualitative and quantitative performance on a broad range of other cognitive operations. (3) Baltes and Lindenberger (1997) offered a different 'common-cause' model of cognitive aging; they observed that sensory function, assessed by tests of hearing and visual acuity, gait, and balance, predicts performance on cognitive assessments. They suggested that sensory declines may index sensory-neural integrity, the 'common cause'. As a result, dual- and multi-tasking is increasingly vulnerable to age-related declines, such that even talking and walking simultaneously are affected (Kemper, Herman, & Lian, 2003).

Age-related cognitive changes have been linked to chronic health conditions, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes (Waldstein, 2000). Of critical relevance is whether gender

affects the pattern or rate of cognitive decline across the lifespan. Schaie (1996) proposed that cognitive abilities that show gender differences in childhood and young adulthood will show gender differences in rates of decline in late life. There is evidence that gender differences in spatial skills (favoring males) and verbal skills (favoring females) are preserved into old age (Whittle et al., 2007; Zimpich, Hofer, & Aartsen, 2004). There is also evidence that men decline more rapidly than women (Elias et al., 1997; Maylor et al., 2007; Zelinski & Stewart, 1998), particularly on tests of spatial abilities. There is other evidence that women decline more rapidly than men (Proust-Lima et al., 2008), especially on tests of processing speed (Deary & Der, 2005; Der & Deary, 2006), and there is also evidence for equivalent rates of decline (Aartsen, Martin, & Zimprich, 2004; Barnes et al., 2003; de Frias, Nilsson, & Herlitz, 2006). It is difficult to draw firm conclusions from these studies due to the use of cross-sectional comparisons, small and non-representative samples, statistical procedures lacking inclusion of controls for education, health, and specific diseases, and the selection of tests with differing levels of sensitivity to cognitive change.

### *Brain*

Evidence for gender differences in the neuropsychology of aging, like that for cognition, is mixed. There is an overall reduction in brain volume with advancing age. While the absolute loss of brain volume is less for women than for men, reflecting the smaller brain and overall body size of women, rates of decrease with age are similar (Raz, Torres, & Acker, 1995), although men may experience a somewhat steeper decline than women for some regions (e.g., the caudate nucleus and putamen). The loss of brain volume is accelerated in the prefrontal cortex (Dennis & Cabeza, 2008), arising from neuronal shrinkage and declines in synaptic density (Huttenlocher & Dabholkar, 1998). This results in reduced prefrontal activation (Grady, McIntosh, & Craik, 1999), which has been linked to age-related

impairments of executive function as well as processing speed (West, 1996). Cabeza (2002) has proposed that frontal activity is less strongly lateralized in older adults than in young adults, implying that older adults compensate for neurocognitive deficits by recruiting both hemispheres to perform tasks that require only a single hemisphere in young adults.

In addition to changing the brain's structure and organization, aging may affect the neurochemical basis of cognition by altering or modulating signal transmission between and among neurons (Li, Lindenberger, & Bäckman, 2010). As a result, stimulus-response relations may be altered, reducing sensitivity to stimuli, increasing the temporal variability of responses, and increasing 'noise' or random activations. One further consequence may be that events and stimuli are encoded less distinctively, resulting in a blurring of memories, increasing variability, and the dedifferentiation of cognitive abilities as they become more correlated (Bäckman, Lindenberger, Li, & Nyberg, 2010).

### *Dopamine and Estrogen*

Although many neurotransmitter systems are affected by aging, the most dramatic changes appear in the dopamine system (Bäckman & Farde, 2005). Age-related declines in the dopamine system, in turn, result in reduced input to the frontal cortex, reflecting the functional interconnectedness of a frontal-striate circuit (Volkow et al., 2000). Women have been reported to have higher dopamine concentrations than men and the age-related decline in dopamine synthesis may be reduced for women (Laakso et al., 2002). However, the role of estrogen on dopamine systems must be considered.

Both excessive and insufficient dopamine has been linked to impaired cognitive functions, especially executive functions associated with the prefrontal cortex. Estrogen enhances dopamine activity; hence, there is some evidence for fluctuations in cognitive function with women's estrogen cycle (Jacobs & D'Esposito, 2011) and estrogen supplementation may enhance dopamine activity, and

consequently cognitive function in postmenopausal women (Craig et al., 2004; Jacobs et al., 1998). However, null effects of estrogen supplementation on cognitive function have also been reported (Hogervorst & Bandelow, 2010) and a variety of factors including the age at onset, duration, and type and level of estrogen supplementation may critically modulate this relationship (Yaffe, 2003).

### *Dementia*

Dementia often begins insidiously, first affecting the ability to learn and recall new information and then gradually progressing to affect language and communication skills, reasoning, long-term recall, and emotional regulation. The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's Disease (AD), accounting for 60–80% of all cases (Alzheimer's Association, 2012). Women are one and half times more likely to develop AD than men, even allowing for women's longevity advantage (Gao, Hendrie, Hall, & Hui, 1998). There is also some evidence that AD in women is more severe and progresses more rapidly (Henderson & Backwater, 1994). These gender differences in AD have been linked to estrogen-deficiency in postmenopausal women. Postmenopausal women also experience other hormonal changes that have been linked to increased risk for AD (Webber et al., 2005).

Yaffe (2003) surveyed existing studies of the effect of estrogen supplementation on AD risk, reporting a 29% decline. There was also evidence that the duration of supplementation was associated with the degree of risk reduction (Dunkin, 2009; Sherwin, 2003). For example, a longitudinal study of the prevalence of AD found that estrogen supplementation significantly reduced the risk of developing AD, and supplementation over 10 or more years appeared to entirely erase the gender-specific increase in AD risk (Zandi et al., 2002). However, such retrospective, observational studies suffer from a variety of biases that make drawing firm conclusions difficult. These include practice effects due to repeated testing, selective attrition, and the common finding that women who take

estrogen supplements after menopause tend to be younger, healthier, and better educated, all factors known to provide some protection from AD and cognitive decline. Randomized-control trials of the effects of estrogen supplementation on women with AD have provided little evidence for beneficial effects on cognitive measures (Sherwin, 2003).

Women may also be more vulnerable to other factors associated with increased risk of AD. A few studies have reported that women who are carriers of the  $\epsilon 4$  allele are at greater risk for developing AD than men who are carriers (Fleisher et al., 2005; Mortensen & Høgh, 2001). Gender differences in the lifetime accumulation of the protective effects of education, occupational attainment, and socioeconomic status may also put women at greater risk for the development of AD.

In contrast to AD, men appear to be at greater risk for the development of other forms of dementia, particularly Parkinson's disease (Baldereschi et al., 2003; Mayeux et al., 1992). Men are more likely to develop vascular dementia, as a result of repeated, small strokes (Jellinger, 2008) and mixed dementia (AD in conjunction with cerebrovascular disease), perhaps as a result of increased risk for cardiovascular disease in mid-life (Azad, Bugami & Loy-English, 2007).

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE EXPERIENCE OF AGING**

Gender differences in patterns of mortality, morbidity, and neurological and cognitive decline constitute the backdrop for how women and men experience aging, defining their sense of well-being, delineating family and social relationships, and influencing their adjustment to caregiving burdens and other changing social roles.

### *Well-being*

Well-being is a mix of overall life satisfaction, and positive affect with a sense of personal growth, self-sufficiency, and autonomy

(Slocum-Gori, Zumbo, Michalos, & Diener, 2009). Well-being has been linked to reduced mortality and other indicators of physical health (Chida & Steptoe, 2008; Steptoe, Dockray, & Wardel, 2009). A sense of well-being may reduce susceptibility to stress and diseases through behavioral pathways (e.g., promoting regular exercise and sleep) or through immunological, cardiovascular, and metabolic mechanisms (e.g., reduction of cortisol levels).

Gender differences in well-being may arise from a variety of sources, including health, family relations, and employment (Ryff, 1995). These factors may change over the lifespan and vary across cohorts, further complicating the understanding of well-being. The relationship between gender, age, and well-being is far from clear (George, 2010). Some studies find that men experience a greater sense of well-being than women (Landau & Litwin, 2001; Warr, Butcher, Robertson, & Callinan, 2004). Some have observed a decline in well-being with age (Netuveli & Blane, 2008), particularly for women (Waddell & Jacobs-Lawson, 2010); others an increase (Cheng, 2004); yet others find stability (Cummins, Eckersley, Pallant, Van Vugt, & Misajon, 2002); and still others find that well-being peaks in mid-life (Blanchflower & Oswald, 2008; Charles & Luong, 2011).

### *Successful Aging*

A related notion of 'successful aging' (Rowe & Kahn, 1997) has been linked to increased survival, reduced morbidity, increased life satisfaction, positive affect, and well-being. As part of the Berlin Aging Study, Smith and Baltes (1997) sought to classify participants, aged 70 to over 100, into subgroups defined by physical health, functional ability, and psychological well-being. Those aging successfully were relatively healthy, socially active, and cognitively fit; those aging less successfully were sick, frail, demented, and impaired. Smith and Baltes found that women were less likely to be aging successfully than men. They suggest that men are

more likely to age successfully due to their higher levels of educational attainment, a greater likelihood of being married and having a surviving spouse, a higher income, and having fewer illnesses over their life course. However, Pruchno, Wilson-Genderson, and Cartwright (2010) suggest there are two components to successful aging: an objective component defined by functional limitations, pain, and chronic diseases, and a subjective component, defined by responses to questions about quality of life. They found that women age less successfully than men on objective indicators, but not in terms of their subjective perceptions. Hence, women may experience chronic diseases and functional limitations yet still feel they are aging successfully.

Individuals adopt different control strategies to meet the demands of daily life and the challenges of growing old and declining health (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). Primary control strategies include redesigning tasks, varying the frequency or duration of tasks, or using technological aids. Such strategies may lose their effectiveness and give way to secondary control strategies such as downgrading the importance of tasks or adopting self-protective thinking by lowering expectations or making optimistic social comparisons. Chipperfield, Perry, Bailis, Ruthig, and Loring (2007) compared how women and men respond to an acute health event in terms of using primary versus secondary control strategies. Men's use of primary control strategies was unaffected by a heart attack or stroke, whereas women's use of primary control strategies declined after a stroke or heart attack. Women, however, adopted more diversified secondary control strategies after the negative health event. This adaptability of women may have long-term benefits, including increased life satisfaction and a sense of aging successfully.

### *Socioemotional Selectivity Theory*

A third model of emotional functioning related to both well-being and successful aging is that of Socioemotional Selectivity Theory (SST) (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen,

Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). SST holds that a sense of time as boundless in youth and young adulthood versus a sense of limited, diminishing time in late adulthood shapes individuals' motivations for seeking information, regulating emotions, and developing a sense of self. Information-seeking peaks in young adulthood whereas emotional regulation increases in importance across the lifespan. Positive affect, happiness, and well-being have been tied to emotional regulation; a late-life increase in emotional regulation has been supported by a variety of findings: older adults are less likely to report having regrets (Torges, Stewart, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2008), to remember the past more positively (Kennedy, Mather, & Carstensen, 2004), and to attend to and remember more positive than negative stimuli (Carstensen & Mikels, 2005). Consistent with SST, Mogilner, Kamvar, and Aaker (2011) found that young adults associate happiness with excitement and novelty but older adults focus on peacefulness, including what sorts of items they report purchasing that made them happy (e.g., athletic shoes vs yoga pants).

SST has, in general, not addressed gender differences in emotional regulation. The exception appears to be a series of studies examining emotional regulation in middle-aged versus older couples (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995). Conversational interactions between older couples were more positive and less physiologically arousing than those between young couples. Further, higher levels of physiological arousal were experienced by men, but not by women, in response to negative affect expressed during the conversations. The later finding suggests that older women may be more effective at emotional regulation than older men.

### *Gender Roles*

Well-being and successful aging have also been associated with gender role orientation. Lippa, Martin, and Friedman (2000) linked measures of gender role orientation originally collected from participants in the Terman

Longitudinal Study (Terman & Miles, 1936) to survival patterns. The measures included preferences for typically masculine versus feminine occupations (e.g., baseball player vs nurse) and masculine versus feminine interests (e.g., athletics vs drawing). Higher masculinity scores among both men and women were associated with reduced survival, even when other personality measures were equated. Femininity, assessed by the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) predicted increased longevity for both women and men in a study of Tokyo centenarians (Shimonaka, Nakazato, & Homma, 1996) and decreased coronary heart disease among 55-year-old men (Hunt, Lewars, Emslie, & Batty, 2007). Femininity may matter because it is linked to reduced smoking and alcohol use, less risk-taking, and other factors that influence health and well-being.

A somewhat different hypothesis has been put forth by Sinnott (1977). She suggests that androgyny, a balance of feminine and masculine traits, provides a recipe for well-being and successful aging. Androgyny among her sample of older women was related to better health, better education, having more children, and a comfortable income, whereas androgyny among the older men was related to worse health, less education, and more life event stressors. Androgyny in women may be an adaptation to meet instrumental goals of families and careers whereas androgyny in men may be a reflection of greater relationship goals, including seeking social and marital support.

Others have also suggested that women who see the period following menopause and their diminishing role as mothers as one of increased opportunity for personal development, age more successfully than those who cling to traditional gender roles (Helson & Moane, 1987; Helson & Wink, 1992). In contrast, those who associate this period with a loss of fertility, youthful appearance, and sexual desirability experience a loss of self-esteem and a reduced sense of well-being and are less likely to age successfully (Muhbauer, 2007; Rossi, 2004).



Canham (2009) has argued that older men may experience a greater loss of self-esteem and well-being than older women. The loss of physical health, independence, and power may threaten older men's sense of masculinity and the 'doing of manhood' (Calasanti & King, 2008, p. 13). An increasing gap between older men's gender role expectations and their own performance may also contribute to the 2–4 times increased likelihood of suicide for older men than for older women and the precipitous increase in suicide rates for men after age 75 (Jensen, Munk, & Madsen, 2010; Kennedy & Tanenbaum, 2000).

### ***Social Relationships***

There is a clear link between longevity, health, cognition, and well-being, and the size and diversity of older adults' social networks (Fratiglioni, Paillard-Borg, & Winblad, 2004). These networks include both close relatives and friends as well as peripheral social partners, community members, neighbors, and acquaintances. Older adults prefer to rely on these diverse networks for instrumental help in managing household and personal care (Blieszner, Roberto, & Singh, 2002) although SST suggests that older adults prefer to spend time with close and intimate social partners for emotional regulation (Carstensen, 2006).

Social networks among young adults tend to be larger for women than for men and some have found that this gender gap diminishes with age along with the size of social networks (Ajrouch, Blandon, Antonucci, 2005; de Jong Gierveld, Marjolein van Groenou, Hoogendoorn, & Smit, 2009). However, McLaughlin, Vagenas, Pachana, Begum, and Dobson (2010) found that women had larger social networks than men at all ages, network size decreased with age only for men, and separated, divorced, and single men had smaller networks than women who were also separated, divorced, or single.

Limited social network size and diversity is more strongly related to functional decline for older men than for older women (Seeman,

Bruce, & McAvay, 1996; Unger, McAvay, Bruce, Berkman, & Seeman, 1999). It has also been reported that older men, but not older women, who have large social networks providing high levels of instrumental support, are at increased risk for functional decline (Avlund, Lund, Holstein, & Due, 2004; Seeman et al., 1996). Older men may interpret instrumental support as indicating greater disability or as a threat to their sense of self-efficacy and, as a result, lose confidence in their ability to carry out functional tasks, leading to a downward spiral of dependency and support.

### ***Marital Advantages and Disadvantages***

Women and men appear to derive asymmetrical patterns of emotional and social support from marriage (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987). Marriage confers greater health and longevity advantages for men than for women (Ross, Mirowsky, & Goldsteen, 1990), perhaps because older married women are burdened by the personal and functional care needs of their aging spouses (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987), because women have larger social networks to draw upon for social and instrumental support (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988), or because women experience greater stress from poor marriages (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). Umberson and colleagues have tracked the impact of marital quality on the physical health of men and women (Umberson, Williams, Powers, Liu, & Needham, 2006). Poor marital quality adversely impacts physical health, and the adverse impact accumulates over time. Since more women tend to report poorer marital quality than men and this gap widens after age 60, the cumulative adverse impact of poor marital quality is greater on women than on men.

### ***Widowhood***

After an initial period of grieving, the loss of a spouse results in surprisingly small deficits in well-being (Faletti, Gibbs, Clark, Pruchno, & Berman, 1989; Lund, Caserta, & Dimond, 1993; Umberson, Wortman, & Kellser, 1992). This suggests that, like other forms of loss

and trauma, people have remarkable resilience, but most studies of widowhood have focused on women. Although widowed women experience greater financial strain than widowed men, widowed men experience greater stress from the loss of social and functional supports provided by their spouse. As a result, widowhood negatively affects survival rates more for men than for women (Bowling, 1987; DeSpelder & Strickland, 1992). Widowed men are more likely to experience depression and a loss of well-being (Lee, DeMaris, Bavin, & Sullivan, 2001) than widowed women, and widowed men are more likely to experience cognitive impairments compared to non-bereaved men (Rosnick, Small, & Burton, 2010). Indeed, widowed men are more likely to die within six months of their spouse compared to widowed women (Fasey, 1990).

Older men become increasingly marginalized in a society numerically dominated by older women, particularly those living in residential care facilities. Whereas the increased social interactions made possible by collective living may promote well-being among older women (Cummings, 2002; Park, 2009), older men in such facilities may be socially isolated. Participation in gender-based social clubs has the potential to offset this isolation and have positive benefits for older men (Gleibs, Haslam, Jones, Haslam, McNeill, & Connolly, 2011).

### *Caregiving*

The 'feminization of aging' (Fleming, 1999) is nowhere more true than in the area of caregiving. Most care for aging individuals is provided informally by women; across studies, 69% of informal caregivers are women (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2006). Caregiving is costly to caregivers, eroding physical and mental health, aggravating arthritis and muscular-skeletal problems, causing sleep disturbances, increasing susceptibility to infectious diseases, triggering feelings of depression and loneliness, and resulting in social isolation and a loss of well-being (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2006, 2007). Female caregivers,

whether wives or adult daughters, are more likely to experience stress and depression than male caregivers (Vitaliano, Zhang, & Scanlan, 2003). The difference in caregiving burden arises, in part, because men tend to provide financial and 'managerial' care whereas women provide care with personal needs such as bathing, toileting, feeding, and help with 'problem' behaviors. Women also tend to provide more care, to care for multiple individuals simultaneously, and to provide care over a longer span of years.

Caregiving can have positive consequences but, disproportionately, these are experienced by male caregivers: Husbands caring for spouses with dementia report a greater sense of competence and pride in their caregiving, and greater improvement in their relationship with their spouse (Fitting, Rabins, Lucas & Eastham, 1986; Miller, 1990; Motenko, 1989) than do wives caring for spouses with dementia. Male caregivers may also receive more social and respite support from friends and other family members (see Fuegen & Biernat, Chapter 9 this volume; Kaye, 2002; Mui, 1995) than female caregivers.

### **AGEISM AND SEXISM**

In 1979, Sontag described the 'double standard' created by the convergence of ageism and sexism. This double standard is apparent in attitudes toward older adults and stereotypes concerning their competence, behavior, and personality. Hummert (1994; Hummert, Garska, & Shaner, 1995) documented both positive and negative stereotypes of older adults. For example, someone who enjoys life, is happy, wise, healthy, and capable is a 'perfect grandparent' whereas someone who is ill-tempered, miserly, bitter, and humorless is a 'shrew or curmudgeon', and someone who is forgetful, slow moving, fragile, and dependent is 'severely impaired'. In a series of studies, Hummert and colleagues examined how women and men at the same age are judged against these stereotypes: photographs of women were more likely to be chosen to

exemplify negative stereotypes such as the 'severely impaired' stereotype, whereas photographs of men were more likely to be associated with positive stereotypes such as the 'perfect grandparent'. Further, individuals exemplifying positive stereotypes were judged to be younger than those linked to negative stereotypes. However, very old men were evaluated more negatively than very old women, suggesting that very old men are perceived as weaker and frailer than very old women. In their meta-analytic review of studies of attitudes and stereotypes of younger and older adults, Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, and Johnson (2005) found that ratings of competence revealed a double standard favoring women. For example, older men are rated as less competent than younger men but age did not influence ratings of women's competence. Double standards for evaluative ratings and behavior intentions favoring women were also in evidence. For example, older women are rated as less generous and less likely to receive help from others than younger women but age did not influence evaluative ratings and behavioral intentions for men.

These stereotypes affect how we communicate with older women and men (Kemper, 1994; Kemper, Vandeputte, Rice, Cheung, & Gubarchuk, 1995), how health care providers talk with and respond to older women versus men (Munch, 2004; Sharp, 1995), and how older women and men are portrayed in films and television (Kessler, Rakoczy, & Staudinger, 2004). Indeed, stereotypes affect the perceived attractiveness of older women and men (Deutsch, Zaleski, & Clark, 2006), the chronological age at which women and men are judged to be 'old' (55–59 for women, 60–64 for men; Sherman, 1997), and how women and men go about the challenge of concealing their age (Clark, 2008). Stereotypes affect how individuals perform in response to priming positive versus negative stereotypes of older adults (Hess, Auman, Colcombe, & Rahhal, 2003; Levy, 2003). We do not know if stereotypes based on gender are more or less powerful than stereotypes based on age. However, the findings of Kite,

Deaux, and Miele (1991) suggest that stereotypes based on age have a greater impact on attributions made than do stereotypes based on gender.

There are still many unresolved questions about how aging affects the health, cognition, and well-being of women versus men. But we must also ask whether there are higher-order standards affecting how women and men age. There is little known about the aging of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals (but see Blank, 2006). And we know very little about how sociocultural factors influence the ways women and men age physically, mentally, or cognitively. Rodin and Langer (1980) suggested that cultural beliefs, including the presence versus absence of negative stereotypes about aging, affect self-esteem, self-efficacy, and cognitive and behavioral outcomes (Levy & Langer, 1994; Park & Gutchess, 2006).

Finally, there is virtually nothing known about gender differences in the design, choice, or outcomes of pharmaceutical, behavioral, or cognitive interventions to reduce risk of dementia, apart from the ongoing debate over estrogen supplementation. There is clear evidence showing that women are at greater risk for the development of AD than men. There is considerable evidence that exercise may reduce risk for and the progression of dementia, and some evidence that women may derive greater benefit from exercise than men (Kramer, Erickson, & Colcombe, 2006). Yet the *National Plan to Address Alzheimer's Disease* (Health and Human Services, 2012) recently released in the United States, makes no mention of gender other than to note that the first identified case of AD was a woman. The report does acknowledge that 'racial and ethnic minorities and people with intellectual disabilities' are at greater risk for developing AD (p. 20); yet, we must ask whether women who are members of racial or ethnic minorities, or women with intellectual disabilities, are at *even greater* risk for developing AD.

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PART III

# Gender Differences and Similarities







# Gender and Personality: Beyond Gender Stereotypes to Social Identity and the Dynamics of Social Change

Luisa Batalha and Katherine J. Reynolds

## INTRODUCTION

It is a common belief, among lay people and scientists alike, that there are basic personality differences between men and women that make them behave in distinctive ways. In this chapter we briefly follow the historical development of ideas regarding the gender–personality relationship. This historical perspective also makes it possible to discern how changes in gender theorizing are accompanied by changes in society at large. The evidence suggests that gender differences should be considered (at this point in time at least) as more spurious than real, and that social forces along with cultural stereotypes and intergroup relations between dominant (male) and subordinate (female) groups shape self-perception in ways that maintain the belief in difference. Building on self-categorization theory, in particular, we show that difference is not inevitable and that people are capable

of changing their environment and, consequently, themselves.

Before we move on to the substance of this chapter some clarifications of terminology are necessary. Research on gender began as the study of sex differences. It was not until the late 1970s that the term gender was even introduced in psychology (see Eagly, Chapter 2 this volume). In this chapter we will use the terms sex and gender interchangeably in line with the relevant work that is being referenced.

## BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW AND FOCUS ON MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

### *The Study of Personality*

It was only after Lewin (1935), Allport (1937), and Murray (1938) published their influential

work that personality became a field of study in its own right. Personality was then understood as dynamically organized and in interaction with the environment. Lewin conceived of personality as *integrated life space*. For Allport, personality was a 'dynamic organization within the individual' (p. 48), and Murray defined it as a conglomerate of voices, needs, pressures, and themes that organize the person's biography.

Alongside this holistic understanding of the person there was also a focus on traits, mainly pursued by Allport (1937). Contemporarily, trait theory is mostly represented by the Big Five (Goldberg, 1993) and the Five-Factor Model of personality (FFM; McCrae & Costa, 1999). There are important differences, however, between Allport's conception of traits and those of latter theorists. Allport (1937) conceived of traits as 'ever-changing' and that the close dependence of traits 'upon the fluid conditions of the environment forbid a conception that is over-rigid or over-simple' (p. 312). In contrast, contemporary trait theorists view traits as endogenous basic tendencies anchored in biology and evolution, and personality as something that can be 'summarized by the FFM' (McCrae & Costa, 1999, p. 139) and 'if there is to be a distinct field of study called personality, its central and defining characteristic must be traits' (A. H. Buss, 1989, p. 1387).

In later decades traits such as authoritarianism, achievement motivation, anxiety, and field independence were developed. But criticism soon arose and doubts about the adequacy of categorizing people into personality 'types' were spelled out, culminating in controversies between trait psychologists and 'situationists'. The influential work of Mischel (1968), arguing that situations, rather than traits, were more predictive of personality, initiated a lengthy nature versus nurture debate. This work was later developed into a model of personality that is person- and process-centered as opposed to a general and invariant taxonomic view of personality. The Cognitive-Affective Processing System model (CAPS; Mischel & Shoda,

1995) is a general framework that helps to delineate an idiosyncratic profile of the person based on what the person brings to the situation and what the situation brings to the person. Behavior results from an *if ... then ...* interaction (if A then Y, but if B then X). The CAPS framework is able to explain intra-individual variability as well as stability in terms of *behavioral signatures*. Despite (or perhaps because of) offering a comprehensive account of personality the CAPS framework as well as other integrative work (e.g., Reynolds et al., 2010; Roberts & Jackson, 2008) have not been as influential as the work based on trait theory (e.g., Goldberg, 1990; McCrae & Costa, 1987). Currently, trait personality, in the shape of the Big Five taxonomy, is receiving the most attention and many other constructs are being researched and understood in relation to the Big Five organizational umbrella.

## **Personality and Gender**

As personality psychology developed, studies showing gender differences in personality also appeared (Heidbreder, 1927; Tyler, 1947). Such findings indicated that women were more neurotic, more introverted, more dependent, less self-sufficient, less dominant, and less self-confident than men. Men, on the other hand, were more aggressive and anti-social than women.

Informed by Darwinian theory, gender differences were understood as evolved adaptations that benefitted the survival of the species. Women's 'passivity' for example, was regarded as an evolved trait that promoted sexual receptivity, and thereby pregnancy and the continuity of the species (Caplan & Caplan, 1994). Findings and their interpretation carried strong androcentric biases (see Hegarty, Parslow, Ansara, & Quick, Chapter 3 this volume) and voices were raised that questioned the primacy of biological antecedents and suggested instead sociological causes of gender differences (Wooley, 1992 [1914]).

An influential research program from this time was the development of the *Masculinity–Femininity Test* (M–F test; Terman & Miles, 1936). Using this measure and, in line with Heidebreder's (1927) and Tyler's (1947) work, Terman and Miles (1936) found that women were more knowledgeable about and preferred terms associated with domestic and kindly activities, whereas men knew more about and preferred terms related to science, business, technology, and adventure. Similarly, women expressed greater interest for indoor, artistic, and decorative activities whereas men were more interested in adventure, risk-taking, and physical strength. Women also preferred disadvantaged people and philanthropists whereas men preferred military and sports heroes, and rebels. Women scored higher in emotional and ethical expressions and were more introverted and submissive, whereas men were more extraverted and dominant.

The next surge of interest in the study of gender difference paralleled the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s. The influential theoretical concepts of *Ego Strength* (Gutmann, 1965) and *Agency and Communion* (Bakan, 1966) were developed, mostly as a critical reaction to Freud's theorizing on gender. Gutmann criticized the contemporary definition of ego strength for being more relevant for men than for women and proposed that, given that the phenomenal worlds of men and women diverge, ego strength should be understood in the context of specific adaptations to male and female lived experience. Bakan's agency and communion was suggested to better represent the reality of men and women than conceptualizations of infantile sexuality as Freud would have it. While recreating the traditional gender dichotomy, both Gutmann and Bakan suggested that both ways of being are necessary and useful.

A further wave of gender research revolved around the concepts of *fear of success* (Horner, 1972) and *androgyny* (Bem, 1974). Fear of success was derived from investigation of *need for achievement* (McClelland, Atkinson, Clark, & Lowell, 1953), which had

shown that women's descriptions of success were accompanied by descriptions of its negative consequences (Horner, 1972). The common understanding was that women fear success because it entails a loss of femininity, which is followed by anxiety, particularly, when competing with men. Horner's initial findings have been difficult to replicate (Levine & Crumrine, 1975). There is also evidence that both men and women show fear of success when the domain is traditionally gender-incongruent, such as men in nursing roles and women in engineering roles (Cherry & Deaux, 1978; Janda, O'Grady, & Capps, 1978).

In hindsight, it is clear that the shifts in research interests and development of conceptual understandings of gender and gender differences reflect the hierarchical gender structure of the society of the time. It indicates that gender differences in personality are associated with social structural gender relations. The degree to which research appears to reflect and affirm the stereotypes of the times and reify these differences in terms of individual personality (with all the associated connotations of biology and rigidity) raises a number of issues regarding what measures of personality actually assess. The concept of androgyny can be seen as a step toward a broader and more liberal view of gender, but there are still problems with its conceptualization as it rests on the dichotomy femininity–masculinity. Given that much work is underpinned by the conceptualization of masculinity and femininity it will now be outlined in more detail.

### ***Masculinity and Femininity***

Since the work of Terman and Miles (1936), the constructs of masculinity and femininity have suffered because they are largely atheoretical and undefined despite being widely researched. Items included in the original M–F test were based on their ability to discriminate between gender groups rather than being informed by theory. Items that elicited significantly different responses between

men and women were taken to be markers of masculinity or femininity (Terman & Miles, 1936), which were believed to be dichotomous traits in that if a person was high in femininity he or she, by definition, would be low in masculinity and vice versa (Constantinople, 1973).

The introduction of the concept of *androgyny* (Bem, 1974; Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975) and the development of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) changed the view of femininity and masculinity as opposing categories and instead conceived them as independent dimensions. As such, masculinity and femininity can be expressed by both men and women and are fluid rather than stable traits. These constructs were later reframed by Bem (1981) in terms of sex-typing which referred to 'the process by which a society thus transmutes male and female into masculine and feminine' (p. 354). This process works through the development of cognitive structures consisting of a network of gender-linked associations, or *gender schemata* that provide a readiness to interpret information in gender-relevant terms. Gendered behavior is therefore, in Bem's view, a result of social learning, mostly through the modeling of role exemplars and cognitive processing of one's immediate environment (see Bussey, Chapter 6 this volume). Ultimately, these processes lead to the integration of a gendered self-concept.

Variations in the meaning and content of masculinity and femininity between cultures, within societies, over time, and between people have been shown, which render the concepts as problematic. There is evidence that both men and women associate femininity and masculinity with biological sex rather than psychological traits (Hoffman, Hattie, & Borders, 2005), and perceptions of the typical male and female differ from perceptions of oneself as feminine or masculine (Spence & Buckner, 2000; Spence et al., 1975). More specifically, people perceive others as more gender-typed than themselves. Because of

the unclear nature of masculinity and femininity it has been suggested that these concepts are best conceived of as idiosyncratic and multidimensional (Deaux & Major, 1987), and that the terms masculinity and femininity denote gender identity rather than gender traits (Spence & Buckner, 2000). Strongly resonating with Bakan's (1966) concepts of communion and agency, Spence and Buckner (2000) suggest that masculinity and femininity scales should be labeled *instrumental* and *expressive* respectively. Indeed, contemporary work suggests that whereas masculinity and femininity are associated with gender identity, instrumentality and communality are affiliated with professional role identity (Echabe, 2010).

Most contemporary research on masculinity and femininity has been pursued by Lippa (1991, 1995, 2001), who suggests that masculinity and femininity can be measured along three dimensions: (1) *instrumentality*, (2) *expressiveness*, (3) *M-F<sub>interests</sub>*. Unlike instrumentality and expressiveness, which are traits, *M-F<sub>interests</sub>* denote everyday gender-related interests in activities, hobbies, and occupations. Whereas masculinity and femininity constitute two independent dimensions, showing the extent to which people have masculine *and* feminine traits, *M-F<sub>interests</sub>* is a bipolar measure revealing whether people have masculine *or* feminine interests (Lippa, 2005). Using the BSRI and the PAQ, Lippa (1995) has explored the links to Big Five personality, showing the association of masculinity with the Big Five trait of openness, and femininity with agreeableness and neuroticism. *M-F<sub>interests</sub>*, on the other hand, was associated with right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) and social dominance orientation (SDO; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) for men, whereas for women it was only marginally associated with RWA.

It is questionable whether interests can be regarded as a personality dimension and there is counter-evidence that questions the hypothesis of an *M-F<sub>interests</sub>* dimension that discriminates between men and women (Ashton & Lee, 2008). Also Lippa's (2005) own work

shows that whereas instrumentality and expressiveness are associated with the Big Five factors of extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism, interests are associated with feminine and masculine self-categorization (e.g., I am a masculine/feminine person). This is in line with Spencer and Buckner's (2000) suggestion that conventional masculinity and femininity scales be understood as tapping into gender traits (e.g., instrumentality, expressiveness) rather than femininity and masculinity (i.e., identity).

### ***The Fuzziness of Masculinity and Femininity***

Clearly, there are conceptual ambiguities with the main constructs used to understand gender – masculinity and femininity. Although the relationship between these constructs has been reconceptualized and extended through the introduction of androgyny, such revision may serve to maintain the lifespan of constructs that really are not offering much explanatory power. Even with well-defined and measurable constructs, it remains debatable whether men and women differ because of prescriptive gender stereotypes or because of real innate gender differences.

There is a fundamental conceptual problem when a construct proposed to reflect gendered personality makes use of markers that simultaneously represent cultural stereotypes of men and women (e.g., competitive, aggressive, gentle, yielding). This is a critical issue because while gender stereotypes are cultural beliefs about men's and women's qualities, personality traits are assumed to be based on genetic predispositions (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 1999). Additionally, stereotypes can be both descriptive and prescriptive (Eagly & Karau, 2002) in that they not only 'describe' men and women but, in 'describing', they can insidiously become prescribing. For example, when the negative stereotype that women have lower math ability is present (stereotype threat), women perform worse in mathematics tests than men (see Betz, Ramsey, & Sekaquaptewa, Chapter 26 this volume). This

shows how existing stereotypes directly interfere with performance, resulting in self-fulfilling prophecies – the stereotype creates reality.

### **CURRENT FINDINGS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY**

The literature reviewed above reveals that the study of gender differences has been fraught with controversy. A special issue of *Feminism and Psychology* (1994) displayed a growing disagreement amongst researchers on whether psychology should continue to study sex differences (see also Eagly, Chapter 2 this volume). Those in favor suggested guidelines for the study of sex differences (Hyde, 1994); argued that such studies may help to 'dispel stereotypes' (Halpern, 1994, p. 528); and that the majority of studies 'have conformed in a general way to people's ideas about the sexes' (Eagly, 1994, p. 515). Those against the study of sex differences contended that science cannot reveal the 'true' nature of men and women (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994) and argued that sex differences need to be understood within the context of 'power-knowledge-practice relations' (Hollway, 1994, p. 539).

In a similar vein, Favreau (1997) questioned whether the search for gender differences creates false dichotomies where they do not exist. She argued that while the null hypothesis testing provides evidence of mean differences, it does not indicate how differences are distributed across groups. The meaning of gender differences was also brought into focus with the use of meta-analyses showing that gender differences in personality are most often small to mid-range (Feingold, 1994) and that their magnitude varies greatly (Hyde & Plant, 1995).

Ironically, at the same time as the meaning of gender differences was being questioned a new personality variable believed to differentiate between men and women at a basic level entered the scene. *Social dominance orientation* (SDO) (Pratto et al., 1994), referring to



the endorsement of group inequality, is proposed to be gender-invariant. Across situations, men should be higher in SDO than women (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1994). This construct has generated considerable research and is suggested to be a surface personality trait (i.e., prone to environmental influences and change) associated with specific facets of the Big Five factors, which are regarded as core traits with genetic bases (Akrami & Ekehammar, 2006). Curiously and contrary to the invariance hypothesis, a study conducted with a large probability sample in Germany showed that women were higher in SDO than men (Küpper & Zick, 2010).

While there are significant differences between males and females in Big Five personality and SDO, studies on gender differences in personality also reveal that the effect sizes are generally low, indicating that men's and women's personalities are more similar than they are different from each other. A meta-analysis (Feingold, 1994) showed that men reported being more assertive and higher in self-esteem than women, whereas women reported higher levels of extraversion, anxiety, trust, and tender-mindedness. Except for tender-mindedness, which showed a large effect size ( $d = -0.97$ ) and assertiveness with a medium effect size ( $d = 0.50$ ), the effect sizes for most traits were small or close to zero (e.g., impulsiveness, activity, locus of control, self-esteem). More recent, cross-cultural findings measuring Big Five personality have shown that women were moderately higher in neuroticism and agreeableness than men, whereas the differences for openness, extraversion, and conscientiousness were small. These differences were in line with gender stereotypes and varied greatly across cultures, with differences being most pronounced in Western cultures (Costa, Terraciano, & McCrae, 2001).

What emerges from studies such as the ones reviewed above is that (a) men's and women's self-perception tend to differ, (b) these gender differences vary culturally and over time, and (c) gender stereotypes

are intimately related to self-perception. Given the alignment of findings for both men and women that support a gender stereotype–gender personality relationship, it is necessary to examine the theoretical explanations for why and how such gender differences emerge. Typically, each theory focuses on some aspects of gender development while neglecting others. We now provide an outline of some of the most influential theories of gender and personality, and expand on a theoretical approach that is not generally regarded as a theory of gender – self-categorization theory and associated social influence processes.

## THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PERSONALITY

### *Psychoanalytical Perspective*

Psychoanalytic theory was the first to provide an explanatory framework for gender differences in personality. Freud (1934) proposed that gender differences were a result of three psychosexual developmental stages (oral, anal, phallic) in infancy. These culminate in the *Oedipus complex* and its resolution, which establishes sex role identification as well as other personality traits for both men and women. Children's understanding that they either possess a penis or lack one, leads boys to identify with their fathers and take on masculine traits whereas girls identify with their mothers and take on feminine traits. In other words, as Freud remarked, 'anatomy is destiny' (Freud, 1934, p. 299).

Also grounded in psychoanalytic thinking, Chodorow's (1974, 1978) theorizing about gender stresses the role of the mother rather than the father. She proposes that the differences in men's and women's personality are due to the family structure and the mother's and father's role and involvement in child-rearing. *Mothering* is given a causal role in determining boys' and girls' personality

development because, being a woman, the mother relates to her daughter and son differently and in accordance to her own gender expectations (Chodorow, 1978). She becomes the first object of identification for her child and this identification promotes relational continuity for the daughter and separation for the son, who must differentiate and seek a new identification figure in the father. Differentiation entails denial of relationship and dependence, whereas continuity of relationship with the mother means an embracing of this form of relating. Continuity/separation and associated forms of relating to others come to define men's and women's developing personalities.

This perspective aims to explain how women come to display more expressive or communal traits, whereas men show more instrumental or agentic traits. There are a number of issues that have been identified with the psychoanalytic theory of gender. One is the presupposition of the nuclear family. By basing the theory on the mother–father–child triangle, it leaves out non-normative family constellations. Gender development under alternative family systems remains unexplained. Recent research on gender and identity development in gay and lesbian families runs counter to such propositions by showing that children growing up with homosexual parents do not differ from other children in important dimensions such as gender role behavior, gender identity, sexual orientation, behavioral adjustment, emotional and cognitive functioning, and measures that tap into personality traits (Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytterøy, 2002; Tasker, 2005). Although, Chodorow (1995) does not claim that her theory offers a universal explanation for gender differences, the theorizing surrounding the reproduction of mothering takes difference for granted and fixed in childhood. It also lacks an explanatory model for fluctuations in personality and does not explain how the 'necessity' for gender differentiation came into being in the first place. Findings showing that gender differences vary culturally are also hard to explain from this theoretical perspective.

## ***Gender Schema Theory***

Gender schema theory, developed by Bem (1981), is a cognitive perspective that merges cognitive development with social learning theory (see Bussey, Chapter 6 this volume). Cognitive schemata are mental networks that organize individual and social perception. Gender schemata are cognitive networks of associations related to gender that are shaped by socialization. Society prescribes which behaviors are gender-appropriate and these, more or less explicit, behavioral prescriptions are assimilated in the evolving personal gender schema. Sex-typing is a result of the perceiver's readiness to process information in line with gender-linked associations comprised in the gender schema. Bem (1981) suggests that gender-typed people are guided by gender schemata and therefore understand femininity and masculinity as opposite poles. Children assimilate the content of the cultural gender schemata at the same time as they grasp that they are either boys or girls and, consequently, learn to identify with some gender types and not with others. From a large pool of personality dimensions, children 'choose' the ones that are 'appropriate' for their own sex. The self-concept becomes organized along masculine or feminine lines and men and women become differentiated as a result of prescriptive norms for gender behavior.

There is evidence that gender-schematic participants are faster to endorse gender 'appropriate' attributes than gender-aschematic participants (Bem, 1981). Similarly, children's gender schemata significantly predict the attribution of stereotypical gender roles to men and women (Levy & Carter, 1989). Moreover, when performing 'gender-incongruent' tasks, gender-schematics feel worse than gender-aschematics (Bem & Lenney, 1976).

There is also research contradicting predictions drawn from gender schema theory. Three experiments designed to find differences between gender-schematics and gender-aschematics in information processing

and evaluation related to gender found gender differences but no effects of gender-type (Schmitt, Leclerc, & Dubé-Rioux, 1988). Also, attempts to replicate the relationship between gender schematicity and recall of gender-related words have failed (Deaux, Kite, & Lewis, 1985). Gender schema theory has been criticized for not accounting for gender ambivalence in addition to the fact that items on the BSRI are mainly gender-trait stereotypes. As such, the boundary between personality and gender stereotypes is blurred and responses to the BSRI become unclear as to whether they represent personality or a gender stereotypical definition of the self. Indeed, the BSRI has been employed as a measure of self-stereotyping (e.g., Schmitt & Wirth, 2009). Also, if gender is culturally determined, how can we explain that, within the same culture, some people become strongly gender-typed whereas others do not?

### ***Evolutionary Psychology***

Whereas the previous theories explain proximal causes of gender differences, evolutionary psychology (EP) offers distal explanations for contemporary differences between men and women. At its core is the assumption that to the extent that men and women have faced similar or different adaptive problems in the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness (EEA, identified as the Pleistocene, between 2588 million and 12,000 million years ago) they will also be similar to or different from each other (D. M. Buss, 1995; see also Byrd-Craven & Geary, Chapter 7 this volume). From this perspective, gender differences were forged by natural selection, and adaptations over thousands of generations resulted in a 'genetic program' that determines human behavior.

The main driver of evolved gender differences are divergences in parental investment. More specifically, gender differences are due to: (a) men's greater desire to mate with multiple women, which causes greater male competitiveness compared to female;

(b) male competitiveness leads to greater risk-taking in men; and (c) reward for female competition is low because women do not need to compete for mating men (Campbell, 2002). It is suggested that gender differences in neuroticism-related emotions such as fear, can be explained in relation to differences in competitiveness. Women's greater parental investment motivates them to fear and to avoid dangerous situations so that they can protect their offspring. In contrast, men's lower investment in offspring allows them the time resources to invest in mating and to seek dangerous situations that intrasexual competition requires. A legitimate question is that if behavior is passed down genetically through sex-selected genes, why do 'risky' men not pass their 'risky genes' on to their daughters?

To say that gender differences in behavior are a result of sexual selection, with parental investment as the primary driver, is an oversimplification of the processes that make a modern person. During history, humans have not just adapted to their natural environment but have also changed it and created culture. Culture (e.g., rules, norms) can be argued as constraining certain biological tendencies and urges in the interests of the group as a whole, allowing for a different set of factors to drive much of human evolutionary history.

Because all humans share the same evolutionary heritage, EP assumes universality of human traits. However, evolution theory itself presupposes that a uniform background for all humans imposes a limit for the scope of selection. Darwinian natural selection assumes that without variability selection does not make sense (Foley, 1995). It is also the case that hunter-gatherer societies were unlikely to be uniform and face identical adaptive problems. A social group living in the hot African savannah were likely to face different adaptive problems than one living in a cold climate. Groups' size also certainly varied, creating different group dynamics in general and sexual dynamics in particular. There is also the pertinent question of whether human traits observed today result

from adaptations in EEA or whether they are being used to infer an evolutionary past, or both (Foley, 1995).

Critics also argue that EP misrepresents evolutionary thought by focusing on reduced and impoverished aspects of it (Lloyd & Feldman, 2002). Rather than understanding living organisms as determined by their genetic makeup, some evolutionary biologists have moved toward a holistic perspective that 'views both development and evolution as processes of *construction* and *reconstruction* in which heterogeneous resources are contingently but more or less reliably reassembled for each life cycle' (Oyama, Griffiths, & Gray, 2001, p. 1). It is proposed that organisms are developmentally constructed rather than genetically programmed (Oyama et al., 2001). A person's 'development is not prescribed in the genes but exerted by the regulatory dynamics of the gene-in-a-cell-in-an-organism-in-an-environment system' (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003, p. 828). Psychological processes are seen as gene-dependent rather than gene-directed.

The stability of human traits, as suggested by EP, is also questioned by findings showing that women's assertiveness, a trait normally associated with men, has increased over time. Twenge (2001) conducted a meta-analysis examining studies from 1931 to 1993, a period in which women's roles and status in society changed with women becoming more active in the public sphere. She not only found that women became more assertive, but their assertiveness varied with their social status and roles. These changes were in line with societal events: women's assertiveness increased before and during the Second World War, decreased after the war, and increased again from the 1970s onwards. During the war, women took on a more public role as men were sent out to the battlefield. After the war, women had to vacate their place to men returning to civilian society, and in the late 1960s second-wave feminism and the demands for equal treatment for women and men initiated a movement out into the public sphere followed by increased

status for women. Such findings suggest that people's social positions have an effect on their personality.

### ***A Social Constructionist View of Gender Differences***

Social constructionism (SC) and postmodern theories such as Queer Theory have produced considerable theorizing on gender. SC scholars argue that gender is not an attribute of the person but a performance (Butler, 1999). We do not have gender, we *do* gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is constructed and situated in social transactions. The conception of gender in SC hangs closely together with the conception of knowledge, which is seen as relative to the knower and socially constructed rather than as a reflection of reality. Language and discourse are the building blocks of knowledge construction as they shape perception and descriptions of reality (see Kurz & Donaghue, Chapter 5 this volume). In this vein, personality is a social construction or a story we live by, rather than a stable structure within the person; personality is an 'accounting strategy' that serves to maintain continuity (Asuutari, 1997, p. 15).

The implications of this view of knowledge for gender is that what we perceive as feminine and masculine behavior is not 'true traits' of men and women but enactments constrained by situational arrangements, particularly those defined by relations of power and status. Personality refers to socially constructed aspects of identity that reflect ideological structures in society (Sloan, 1997). Traits such as assertiveness or passivity reflect not only the power structures in society but individualist understandings of personality. Rather than viewing personality as innate, SC theorists suggest that personality in any given situation is a 'congealed moment of social process' and is 'a complex intertwining of social class, ethnicity, socialization, life experience, identity development and so forth' (Sloan, 1997, p. 100). Personality inventories, rather than representing a person's enduring

dispositions, symbolize the person's subjective lived experience. Moreover, the process of labeling people in terms of personality traits is seen as a way of exerting control over them. For example, the labeling of men as assertive or dominant, and women as passive or nurturing, immediately relegates them to different spheres of social life that differ in terms of power and status.

Research from a social constructionist perspective is mostly conducted through discursive methods, where analysis of discourse is used to uncover how the self or personality is constructed or performed in dialogical interaction. Such investigations reveal the binary structure of language and, as such, how it contributes to the construction of the dichotomy self/other (Gergen, 2011) in general, and man/woman in particular. Discursive work has illustrated how the self in childhood is constructed through different forms of storytelling. Self-construction can be found in caregivers' stories about the child, in caregivers' intervention in the child's own stories, and the child's appropriation of another's story (Miller, Potts, Fung, Hoogstra, & Mintz, 1990).

One problematic issue with SC is the emphasis on sociocultural influences in detriment to the role of individuality and personal agency, which limits the understanding of the person (Jenkins, 2001). The question is how the construction of self-experience becomes idiosyncratic. By what processes does the person construct, reconstruct, and change the self-concept from past and present experience? What processes account for the choice of one perspective on life and the self over another? Jenkins (2001) argues that the ability to rise above given circumstances is an aspect of individuality rather than social construction and is not reducible to cultural and social processes. He further argues that SC does not distinguish between the self as *cultural content* and *processes* of psychological functioning. Whereas self-development is dependent on a person's family and community, how and whether a person adjusts or not to this influence is a matter of individual agency.

## SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORIES

A critical point that emerges from this overview of the main theories related to gender differences and personality is that the processes through which cultural practices come to have psychological impact are underdeveloped. There is recognition of gender identification and parenting practices and socialization (leading to gender-schemata) as well as the social construction of gender. It is also highlighted that culture does not affect its members uniformly and that some accept and others reject the lessons society wants to teach. A detailed analysis has been developed in self-categorization theory of how culture comes to affect individual psychology and when and how it will affect self-perception and behavior in a given situation or context. Critical constructs are social identity, categorization processes, and social influence.

The social identity perspective (SIP), comprised by social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel, 2010a [1978]) and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), aims to explain behavior through recognition that people are both individuals and group members and as such have both personal and social identities. Social identity is 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the values and emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel, 2010b [1978], p. 22).

Depending on the salient dimensions of comparison, people may self-categorize at the individual level as a unique person (i.e., me, I – personal identity), or at the collective level (i.e., us, them – social identity) along shared characteristics of the group. When personal identity is salient, self-perception is determined by the differentiating attributes between the person and a counterpart. When social identity is salient, the person *self-stereotypes* in accordance to the relevant social identity. Self-stereotyping is central to the process of self-categorization. When people



categorize themselves as members of a particular social group they also *take on* characteristics typically attributed to that social category. The process of social identification requires social comparison: when people identify as members of a specific group they do so against a background of other groups. In this way they define themselves as either similar to (ingroup) or different from (outgroup) the available group categories.

The social identity perspective recognizes that groups and group interests shape the form of social organization and social structure that define the cultural contexts in which people live, work, and play. Social environments do not simply evolve naturally but are shaped by group interests. Men and women as individuals and groups exist within this organizing framework, which can be more or less gender-segregated and hierarchical. A gendered society clearly serves some interests where one group has more social, political, and economic power than another. This is clearly demonstrated in empirical work showing that, among men, the association of beliefs in gender hierarchy (sexism) with beliefs in innate gender differences (essentialism), is dependent on whether essentialism promotes or challenges the status quo (Morton, Postmes, Haslam, & Hornsey, 2009). When men consider increasing gender equality (social change) their sexism scores go hand in hand with essentialism scores. On the other hand, when they consider the stability of female disadvantage across time (status quo), or think about areas in which they are disadvantaged in relation to women (reversed status quo), this relationship disappears or reverses. Clearly, when the status quo is threatened the more powerful group (men) adopt beliefs concerning natural disadvantage and innate differences, which provide justification for gender inequality. Thus, the belief and promotion of gender differences contains an in-built payoff mechanism that encourages men as a group to prevent social change. Undoubtedly, the gender stereotypes that are part and parcel of patriarchal and essentialist beliefs

inform self-perception in ways that promote status quo and prevent change in structural gender relations.

Although gender stereotypes operate insidiously in defining the self, it is also the case that advantaged and disadvantaged groups can accept or reject the status-quo, both in terms of category definitions and social structure. In social identity theory, in particular, it is argued that individuals and groups are motivated towards positive self-definition and positive distinctiveness for their own group compared to others. A critical question has been how members of low-status groups achieve such positive distinctiveness. The answer includes understanding how members of low-status groups perceive group relations in terms of the dimensions of permeability, legitimacy, and stability. It is possible that such differences in status and power are perceived as legitimate and stable or as illegitimate and unstable. It is under the latter conditions that identification with the low-status group and coordinated action towards achieving social change is likely to emerge.

Testing these ideas Ellemers and colleagues (Ellemers, Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990) found that when group boundaries are permeable, individuals show less ingroup identification and tend towards individual mobility rather than group mobilization. On the other hand, unstable group status drives collective mobilization for social change.

More relevant for change in gender relations are findings showing that feminist social identity is associated with positive evaluation of feminists and beliefs in collective action (Williams & Wittig, 1997). Most importantly, and in line with the social identity perspective, is that perceptions of feminists are predictive of identification as feminist. That is, one is happy to identify with a group that is positively valued.

In self-categorization theory, there is also an emphasis on the idea that it is through one's psychological group memberships that social influence becomes possible. It is this process of social influence that is important in explaining how others 'like us' (e.g., family, peer, media) play an important role in shaping

the psychology of the person (e.g., beliefs, values, norms). It is with like-minded others that we come to a shared understanding of our circumstances. This analysis of psychological similarity with others and associated social influence provides a mechanism for explaining how 'who we are' can shape 'who I am' (and vice versa).

It is possible that certain beliefs and values become deeply rooted within a person precisely because they capture people's position as group members and collective understandings of themselves as group members in the context of broader intergroup dynamics. One's group memberships also change as a function of changes in individuals' experiences and opportunities across the life course (e.g., attending university, becoming a parent, finding religion). The more significant the group is, or becomes, to the individual (e.g., impacting on their daily rituals and lives) the greater the impact on one's self-views including, perhaps, personality processes. It is also the case that it is through the emergence of particular social identities and associated leadership (influence) that the development of beliefs and ideologies that challenge existing group relations (e.g., illegitimacy, instability) can become more widespread, providing a basis for social change.

The social identity perspective is particularly relevant to the area of gender and personality precisely because it helps to explain how gendered schemata are an outcome of intergroup relations and follow the relevant social structure. It becomes possible to appreciate how and when stereotypes become internalized by some members of society and rejected by others and inform practices. It is also when gender is salient and contextually relevant that most gendered self-perception and behavior is likely to emerge. Perhaps more fundamentally, the perspective provides an account of the underlying mechanisms through which social change dynamics can affect stereotypes and associated personalities.

## NEW INSIGHTS ON GENDER AND PERSONALITY

There is much contemporary work on gender that is consistent with the importance of salient social (gender) identity and social influence. There is evidence that by the age of five, children self-stereotype in gender terms more when gender is salient than when it is not (Bennett & Sani, 2008). By the age of seven, children have an established sense of collective identity (us) such that they feel embarrassed by transgressions committed by members of their ingroup (Bennett, Yuill, Banerjee, & Thomson, 1998). These findings give new insights and extend the work on gender development (e.g., Bem, 1981; Chodorow, 1974, 1978). Although gender schemata are easily accessible, whether they come to shape self-perception is dependent on whether gender is a defining dimension in a particular situation.

Likewise, studies investigating variables that are supposed to differ between men and women have shown that those differences vary depending on the situation. Investigations of moral reasoning and ways of knowing show that connected (typically feminine) and separate (typically masculine) ways of knowing are dependent on whether the knowing is assessed in a similar ingroup or dissimilar outgroup context (Ryan & David, 2003). In an ingroup context, where one's similarity to others was salient, the way of knowing was more connected. In contrast, in an outgroup context, where difference between self and others was salient, the way of knowing was more separated. On the other hand, when differences between men and women were made contextually salient, women's way of knowing was more connected and men's was more separated. Similarly, in a study on moral reasoning, when a target was perceived as an ingroup member, people tended to use a care-approach moral reasoning more than when they were perceived as outgroup members (Ryan, David, & Reynolds, 2004). Again, gender differences were found only when gender was salient.

Self-perception of men and women on the personality-type dimension of (in)dependence can also vary depending on salient identity (personal or social). Onorato and Turner (2004) investigated schematic-dependent and -independent people in contexts where male or female identity was salient (Study 1). They found that in such conditions, and irrespective of having a dependent or independent self-schema, men endorsed more independent words and were faster and more confident when responding in an independent manner. For women the pattern was the opposite. Irrespective of their self-schema, women endorsed more dependent words and were faster to respond in a dependent manner when gender was salient. A similar pattern of results was obtained when the words endorsed denoted femininity and masculinity rather than dependence and independence. Irrespective of self-schema, overall men showed a preference for 'masculine' words whereas women preferred 'feminine' words.

Onorato and Turner (2004) also manipulated personal and social identity rather than male and female identity. They found that in the personal identity condition high independents endorsed more independent words than low independents, who endorsed more dependent words. In contrast, in the social identity condition, both high and low independents endorsed independent words equally. Similarly, in the personal identity condition high independents endorsed more masculine words than low independents, whereas in the social identity condition both dependents and independents alike preferred stereotypical feminine words. These findings show that irrespective of a person's self-schema, whether he or she self-defines as dependent/independent or feminine/masculine is determined by the salient identity (personal or social). Similarly, across four studies it was consistently found that women rated themselves as more relational than men and men less so than women in intergroup but not in intragroup conditions (Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, & Redersdorff, 2006).

There is also evidence drawing from SCT that contradicts evolutionary explanations of gender differences. SDO is believed to be gender-invariant (Sidanius et al., 1994) yet gender differences in SDO are dependent on a range of factors including culture, ideology, and group status (Batalha, Reynolds, & Newbiggin, 2011). Under conditions of high status, men and women did not differ in their levels of SDO but significant differences did emerge under conditions of low status. Similarly, gender differences in SDO were found in an intergroup condition but not in an intragroup or control condition (Guimond et al., 2006), and were found to be mediated by feminine self-stereotyping and hostile and benevolent sexism (Schmitt & Wirth, 2009). Furthermore, in situations where gender is salient, gender differences in SDO arise, but when ethnic group membership is salient gender differences in SDO are eliminated (Huang & Liu, 2005). Findings such as these resonate with Mischel and Shoda's (1995) *if ... then ...* model of personality rather than with an understanding of personality in terms of stable personality traits.

Big Five traits traditionally associated with gender have also been found to vary across time. There is evidence that neuroticism/anxiety has increased in the general population across time (Twenge, 2000) suggesting societal influences on personality traits. There are also data suggesting that neuroticism may change across time for both men and women in some conditions but not in others. Batalha and Reynolds (2013) conducted a longitudinal study where neuroticism was measured twice approximately one week apart. At the time of the second measurement participants were asked to think and write down occasions where they felt either vulnerable or invulnerable. An interaction between phase of measurement and condition emerged such that participants' levels of neuroticism in the vulnerable condition increased from phase 1 to phase 2, whereas neuroticism scores in the invulnerable condition did not change. There is also evidence that higher levels of neuroticism are attributed to women rather

than to men, particularly when gender identity is salient rather than personal identity (Bergh, Akrami, & Ekehammar, 2011).

Findings like these provide evidence that (1) gendered personality, rather than simply being a stable property of the person, is also contextual; (2) gender stereotypes determine self- and other-perception; and (3) gendered personality is partially determined by what behaviors are appropriate in a specific historical context. This evidence is in line with Allport's (1937) conception of personality traits as ever-changing and dependent on the fluid conditions of the environment as well as with the CAPS model of personality (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). These findings show that gendered personality is not inevitable. Because identity is dependent on self-stereotyping, it suggests that if gender stereotypes change, gendered self-perception is also likely to change.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

One implication that can be derived from the social identity approach is the proposition of a feedback loop between psychological change and social change. In support of this hypothesis is empirical work showing how societal change is accompanied by changes in men's and women's self-perception (Twenge, 1997, 2001), and how changes in social identity-definition can lead to social change. Importantly, based on SIP it is predicted that for this to happen, shifts in self-perception will have societal effect only if people act collectively in terms of their social rather than personal identity. A case in point is the women's movement that evolved from ongoing dissatisfaction with disadvantage and patriarchal structures paired with successful leadership (and associated influence) on the part of women. Awareness of who we are (self-categorization) and our place in the social structure, together with a rejection of received traditional gender definitions is necessary for mobilization and the achievement of change.

One of the best examples in which female collective mobilization has had great social impact is the case of the women's movement in Sweden. Parallel with the emergence of the women's movement in the Western world in the 1960s, women's organizations associated with political parties grew very strong in Sweden. Notably, across political affiliations, the problem was defined in similar ways: namely, there is a democratic deficit in that women are underrepresented in political office despite being half the citizenry. While gendering the debate by demanding gender equality in participation and influence, it also was framed in 'ungendered' (Sainsbury, 2005, p. 199) terms by making claims as citizens rather than as women. This strategy allowed women to unite as a group with common grievances and, consequently, with common goals rather than being divided along party lines. As a consequence of this mobilization women's representation in parliament increased from 27.2% in 1982 to 45% in 2010 (SCB, 2012). This approach provides a fine illustration of how the salience of different levels of inclusiveness in social identity (superordinate, intermediate) can be strategically deployed to achieve social change.

This form of collective action initiated a path of social reforms that has changed Swedish society dramatically in terms of increased gender equality, particularly in political power and, from a world perspective, has made Sweden stand out. Women's collective mobilization ejected gender equality as a top priority in politics. The issue of lack of representation in political power was followed by the debate of lack of representation in appointed top executive government institutions. This time the debate was framed in gendered terms and it was argued that government agencies make decisions on redistributive resources but that men and women have different needs. Without a proportional representation of men and women decisions would fail to meet their needs equally. An outcome of this mobilization was that political parties adopted guidelines suggesting that women's representation should reflect the composition of the population.

Consequently, there was an increase of women in top administrative positions from 5% to 30% in 10 years between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s (Sainsbury, 2005). Statistics for 2012 show that women hold over 40% of these positions (SCB, 2012). The political influence afforded women through mobilization also had wider repercussions in society, as illustrated in the well-developed childcare system and shared parental leave that facilitate women's participation in the labor market.

This example demonstrates well the mechanisms of social change driven by identity processes. Social identity postulates that depending on whether social relations are perceived as permeable or impermeable actors will use strategies accordingly. In the case of the Swedish women's movement it was acknowledged that identity as a woman was associated with disadvantage, group boundaries were impermeable (women cannot generally become men), and structural gender relations were seen as illegitimate. As predicted by the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), in such conditions people will choose to mobilize collectively and challenge the status quo. With respect to gender personality, it is clear that if the gender stereotypes that are attributed to women (stereotypes that effectively render them to a subordinate position) were an innate part of women's nature, the agency and mobilization required for change would be unlikely. And, just as much as women could have not achieved such outcomes as individuals, neither could individual men achieve a similar mobilization and associated social change despite being stereotyped as assertive and agentic. Both genders can achieve social change by acting collectively. Importantly, collective action may bring out qualities in the person that were likely never to come to the surface were they to choose to act alone. The low score on the cultural dimension of femininity-masculinity indicating that Sweden is, relative to other nations, more 'feminine' (see Batalha et al., 2011), provides an indication of psychological change following social change.

The important message to take from this research is that along with social change and associated stereotype change, self-stereotyping and personality change is also possible. Self-categorization processes affect the meaning and usefulness of gender as a category, its meaning, and impact on self-definition and, consequently, personality. It needs to be recognized that socialization is not a uniform or passive process and that people can come to accept or reject the lessons society deems to teach (Turner & Reynolds, 2004). It is possible to dissent from the meaning that is provided and reinvent the group in new ways. This analysis does not focus on pre-determined, fixed, static qualities of being masculine or feminine, and opens up a range of interesting theoretical questions regarding how and when gender stereotypes will be accepted or rejected and come to affect personality processes.

## CONCLUSION

We began by providing an overview of the study of personality, gender, and the relationship between these two domains of inquiry. One major issue that can be abstracted from the literature is the intertwining of gender stereotypes and personality which has biased the understanding of gendered personality. Starting with androcentric biases it continued through to the inability of separating gender stereotypes from personality measurement. The constructs of masculinity and femininity remain undefined, and the instruments used to measure them make use of markers that denote gender stereotypes. Similarly, some of the items used to assess the Big Five factors (i.e., agreeableness: I feel other's feelings, I have a soft heart; and neuroticism: I often feel blue, I change my mood a lot) tap into gender stereotypes.

Of course one could argue that gender stereotypes resemble gender differences in personality traits because they actually are accurate descriptions of men and women. However, as noted, stereotypes are not



only descriptive but also prescriptive and, as such, can readily become self-fulfilling prophecies. Psychology has a less than flattering history of interpreting and reifying gender stereotypes in terms of fixed gender differences. We suspect that despite serious attempts to understand gendered behavior, the domain of gender and personality is still haunted by this biased legacy.

The SIP proposes a different way of looking at gender differences. When men and women are examined as members of different groups that, to some extent, are in conflict with one another, rather than as individuals, then it is easy to understand how gender differences indeed serve certain interests. In our view, research on gender differences, rather than investigating core differences between men's and women's personality, which are mostly descriptive and serve to reify difference, should instead attempt to explain differences and how such differences relate to other political and economic forces in society. *Difference* is not simply a harmless product of natural evolution but is genuinely political. The socio-economic-political nature of inter-group relations construes the group identity and, by extension, the self-definitions of group members. The failure of psychology to recognize the political, including how the findings of the science itself can be used to justify and perpetuate difference (and advantage some groups over others), will serve to further limit advances. It is in explaining why we have the stereotypes we do, when they become predictive of behavior, and how they can be changed, that we believe further theory and research is needed. At the very least until psychology has thoroughly pursued these questions it should be cautious about its claims regarding gender and personality.

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# The Social Basis of Emotion in Men and Women

Agneta Fischer and Catharine Evers

## INTRODUCTION

When asking the question ‘who is the more emotional sex’, the answer that will be likely is ‘women’. Gray’s (1992) book about the emotional Venus-women and the rational Mars-men reflects this popular view about the core difference between men and women. It fits in a long tradition in Western thought in which women have been associated with emotionality and men with reason (Shields, 2002). Although the sexes have reached more similar positions in the social structure, at least in Western societies, people continue to believe that women pay more attention to their own and others’ feelings and intuitions, while men are more focused on rational thought. These common beliefs seem to support not only the idea that women are the more emotional sex, but also the emotional experts.

However, it is worth briefly pondering about when and why we call someone ‘emotional’, by considering the following events viewed widely in the media. Was Rafael Nadal emotional when he won Roland Garros, the prestigious French Open tennis tournament in

Paris, for the sixth time, and fell on his knees to the ground? Was Oprah Winfrey emotional when she said goodbye to her public during her last show after 25 years? Were the two students responsible for the Columbine High School Massacre emotional? And, were Hillary Clinton or Newt Gingrich emotional when they teared up during their presidential campaigns?

In answering these questions, it is likely that Western observers believe Oprah and Hillary to be more emotional than the men in the above examples. The schematics that we have been taught by Western philosophy are dominated by dichotomies such as emotion–rationality, nature–culture, women–men. This is corroborated by recent research (Barrett & Bliss-Moreaux, 2009) showing that women’s emotion expressions are more often seen as reflecting their dispositions, whereas men’s emotions are more often explained in terms of situational causes. Men don’t cry because they are emotional, but because they lost the most important game of their life. Some of such schemas may contain a kernel of truth; else the belief in the emotional woman versus the rational man would

not be the topic of popular bestsellers and would not require a separate chapter in this volume. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that these dichotomies are obviously too simple to capture the rich emotional lives of men and women. This leaves us with the challenge of explaining general gender differences in emotional reactions, while leaving room for their absence and the context-sensitivity of these differences.

The question that we will try to shed light on in this chapter is the *how* and *why* men and women are different in their emotional reactions. We will not restrict our review to the question of which gender experiences and expresses emotions with different intensity or frequency; instead we aim to cover the broader questions of how men and women deal with emotions in different contexts, and how they emotionally regulate their own and others' lives in such a way that they are effective in their social role. Our explanatory framework is based on Deaux and Major's (1987) interactive model of gender-related behavior and Eagly's (1987) social role theory (e.g., Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000), emphasizing the influence of both general (self-) stereotypes about men and women and the context dependency or modifying conditions that increase or decrease such differences. We combine these frameworks in a social-contextual model of emotions (Fischer & Manstead, 2008; Parkinson, Fischer, & Manstead, 2005), in which emotions are seen as part of our relations with others. Our general line of argument is that differences in men's and women's emotional reactions are the result of both relatively distal factors, such as cultural, gender-specific stereotypes and norms, and more proximate context-specific goals, motives and expectations that may increase or decrease the size of these gender differences. Such goals, motives, and expectations may override general gender stereotypes, because of role-based constraints, for example in the case of a female chief executive or a male nurse, but also because of the nature of the situation, such as losing a competition, or supporting a sick parent.

We will begin by discussing distal factors, such as the emotionality stereotype and gender-specific norms. In the second part of this chapter we will review further evidence for actual differences in emotional experiences and expressions in different types of situations, and finally discuss the apparent paradox that women are seen as more emotional, but also as more emotionally intelligent.

## **MEN FROM MARS AND WOMEN FROM VENUS: AFFECTIVE GENDER STEREOTYPES**

Emotionality is not a gender-neutral label. Research by Shields (1987, 1991) has shown that when people think about an emotional person, it is most likely to be a woman. A study by Timmers, Fischer, and Manstead (2003) further showed that individuals have stronger stereotypical beliefs about the emotions of women than men. It should be noted, however, that whereas women are seen as the emotional sex, men are not seen as the unemotional sex. People are generally aware of the fact that men too have emotions, but that does not make them emotional. 'Being emotional' thus refers to a specific range of emotions and emotional behaviors (Brody & Hall, 2008; Fischer, 1993; Shields, 1987). Someone who shows pride, enthusiasm, happiness, guilt, anger, or irritation, is generally not referred to as emotional, in contrast to someone who is sad, anxious, upset, melancholic, or depressed. 'Emotional' refers to emotions that are characterized by a lack of control, by being helpless, or being overwhelmed by an emotional event. It is for this reason that crying is often seen as the central element of describing someone as an emotional person.

A second criterion is the transgression of emotional norms (see Shields, 1991). Someone who expresses an appropriate emotion, in an appropriate context, with appropriate intensity is not seen as emotional. However, someone who remains sad about losing a race that was actually not that



important, who is constantly worried about exams when having passed all previous ones, or is on the verge of crying whenever someone says something mildly critical, is more likely to be considered an emotional person.

One reason why women are called the emotional sex may therefore be based on the types of emotions women are typically believed to display. Gender stereotypical emotions follow the distribution of men and women into different gender roles (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Thus women are more prone to emotions that fit with a communal and caretaker role and a more relational or interdependent orientation (Cross & Morris, 2007; Guimond, Chartard, Martinot, Crisp, & Redersdorff, 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), such as happiness for others, concern, sadness or anxiety (Fischer & Manstead, 2000). Women's expression of these emotions can be seen as supporting their communal tasks in the family because showing and sharing one's feelings can fulfill family members' emotional needs (Clark, Fitness, & Brissette, 2004). On the other hand, men's provider role requires them to refrain from emotional expressiveness, or to display only those emotions that emphasize this role, such as anger (see also Hutson-Comeaux & Kelly, 2002; Kelly & Hutson-Comeaux, 1999). In other words, specific gender roles are in line with specific emotions, and female roles especially require the enactment of powerless emotions that also form the core of the emotionality stereotype.

In addition, the status and power associated with these gender roles may also facilitate or inhibit specific emotions. In general, we argue that anger, contempt, disgust and pride are the more powerful or agentic emotions and support perceptions of dominance (see Hess, Blairy, & Kleck, 2000), whereas sadness, guilt, shame, and happiness can be seen as communal emotions that support perceptions of affiliation and subordination.

Indeed, research on emotion stereotypes has shown that happiness, sadness, and fear are more typically associated with women, whereas anger is more typically associated

with men (Fischer, 1993; Kelly & Hutson-Comeaux, 1999; Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000; Shields, 1987; Weber & Wiedig-Allison, 2007). Studies on the interpretation of emotions in male or female faces are consistent with this gender stereotype. Individuals are faster in detecting anger in male than in female faces, and in detecting happiness on female than on male faces (Becker, Kenrick, Neuberg, Blackwell, & Smith, 2007; Ohman, Juth, & Lundqvist, 2010). In addition, when the emotional expression is ambivalent, for example reflecting a blend of anger and sadness, observers see more sadness in a female face and more anger in a male face (Plant, Kling, & Smith, 2004).

Studies by Hess and colleagues (Hess, Adams, & Kleck, 2004; Hess, Thibaut, Adams, & Kleck, 2010) further show that this gendered perception of emotions on the face can be explained by both social role expectations and by differences in facial appearance. Individuals with a nurturing role are seen as happier, but also more anxious, sad, and surprised than individuals with a provider role, who are seen as more angry, disgusted, and contemptuous. At the same time, facial markers of dominance and affiliation, such as strong jaws and heavy eyebrows versus a baby face with large eyes, also add to gender role-congruent inferences from the face. Thus, individuals with a dominant facial appearance are more likely to be seen as angry, whereas individuals with an affiliative appearance are thought to be sad, independently of whether they are a man or a woman.

Stereotypes set expectations, but they also create norms or display rules (Hochschild, 1983) about which emotions are seen as appropriate or desirable and dictate how we should evaluate emotion expressions in particular contexts. Historical research on emotion culture (see Stearns, 2008 for an overview) has shown that explicit discussions on emotional standards became more public in the 17th and 18th centuries, when changes in social and work circumstances resulted in changed ways of thinking about family relations, parent-child relations, work

relations, and so on. Several analyses have shown shifts in cultural norms or 'emotionology' regarding the expression of specific emotions, such as anger, in specific historical periods (Stearns & Stearns, 1986).

Such emotion standards have always been different for men and women (see Lutz, 1990; Shields, 2002). For example, in an analysis of Dutch 'Spectatorial papers' in the 18th century, Sturkenboom (1998) shows that the emotional ideal consisted of a balance between passion and reason in every individual. The Spectators served to educate their readership in these ideals by telling stories about specific social categories that deviated from these norms. Among these categories were women who were described as power-mad persons who dominated their husbands and the male characters who were described as effeminate, childish, and immature. Another strategy that was often mentioned was the reinforcement of positive emotions, in both men and women, such as the love for one's country, friendship and sympathy for the weak, and love for one's partner and family. Men were especially encouraged to become more sensitive and to show their potency to be good, empathic civilians (Sturkenboom, 1998). This emphasis on men's sensitivity changed in the 20th century when the division into gender-specific roles became stricter. Men were educated to endure hardship and to show no emotions, whereas women were thought to be the safe, emotional haven at home.

Recent developments in emotion norms in Western countries point to radical changes with respect to gender-specific emotion culture. Television shows and programs show crying, loving, fearful, and anxious men as well as women, and these public models imply men are allowed to show their emotions as much as women. These changes in public emotion displays suggest that it is the context, and not one's sex, that determines the appropriateness of the expression of emotion. A study by Labott, Martin, Eason, and Berkey (1991) even suggested that the crying of men, such as a man who tears up when

watching a sad movie, evokes greater sympathy than women who do the same.

The question is whether such judgments are the result of changing emotion norms: are we currently living in a more gender-neutral world? In a study conducted in the Netherlands (Timmers et al., 2003), gender-specific norms and expectations were investigated for a variety of emotions. The results showed that women were expected to experience and express more powerless emotions (e.g., fear, sadness, shame) than men, but that the explicit norms related to the appropriateness of these behaviors hardly differed for men and women. Still, although such norms may be gender-neutral at an explicit level (especially among higher-educated individuals), they may still operate as cues at an implicit level. On the basis of the empirical literature, we distinguish two gender-specific emotion norms.

The first emotion norm is directly related to the communal dimension of women's caretaker's role, namely that women should display positive emotions. Women are expected to smile more, to create a positive atmosphere, and to display enthusiasm, admiration, or love. Women who do not smile are more likely to be considered as unfriendly, asocial, or even bitches compared to men who do not smile. Several studies have shown that, compared to men, women indeed expect more negative social sanctions when they fail to show positive emotions (Graham, Gentry, & Green, 1981; Stoppard & Gunn Gruchy, 1993). This norm also influences emotion regulation. A survey study by Simpson and Stroh (2004) found that while female managers suppressed negative, and expressed positive, emotions, male managers showed the reverse pattern.

A second norm is that while women are prohibited from displaying strong, dominant or powerful emotions, men are prohibited from showing emotions that display weakness, lack of power, or incompetence. Men are expected to express more powerful emotions, associated with competence and dominance, whereas women are expected to display more

powerless emotions such as fear, sadness, shame or guilt (Timmers et al., 2003). Indeed, male professionals who show anger are seen as having higher status compared to those men expressing sadness, whereas the reverse is true for women (Brescoll & Uhlman, 2008). In other words, the expression of powerless emotions is normative for women, whereas the expression of powerful emotions is more normative for men.

Thus, the content of gender-specific stereotypes and norms can be summarized in terms of two dimensions: communality/care and dominance/power. Women are assumed to display emotions in line with a communal orientation. Although there is not a strong norm that men should *not* display those emotions, it is especially the absence of these displays that shows the subtle gender norm. Thus, women are judged more negatively if they do not show positive emotions, in comparison with men. Men on the other hand, are assumed to show emotions that emphasize their dominance, especially in more competitive settings, whereas women are more allowed to show emotions that signal submissiveness and powerlessness. It should be noted that the norms for men seem to be less strong and less explicit than those for women, except that men are assumed to be in control and to hide their emotions from others.

## **BEYOND VENUS AND MARS: 'ORDINARY' GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EMOTIONS**

### ***Emotions as a Function of Social Context***

In the second part of this chapter we will review empirical evidence on actual gender differences in emotion and show that there is support for these gender stereotypes, especially with regard to the expression of emotions. However, whereas an evolutionary view focuses on general differences and stresses the independence of

sex differences from culture and social contexts (see Bryd-Craven & Geary, Chapter 7 this volume; Vigil, 2009), we argue that a social contextual framework can explain the absence or reversal of these stereotypical emotional reactions of men and women in different contexts (e.g., Grossman & Wood, 1993).

Our basic assumption is that emotions are continuously regulated as a function of social context (Fischer & Manstead, 2008). This regulation can take the form of consciously trying to control or change one's emotions, but also of unconsciously adapting emotions in order to form an appropriate reaction within a relational setting. The most important sources for this emotion regulation are normative demands, and relational expectations and goals in the social context. This implies that emotional reactions need not be a 'natural response' to an emotional stimulus or event. Men and women have learned to regulate their emotions, particularly their emotion expressions, in different ways in response to prevailing norms and expectations. Individuals also have an interpersonal history with many others with whom they interact. Thus, modifying conditions such as the identity of another person, one's relationship with the other person, one's status or power, and the specific task at hand, all constitute the nature of our emotional reaction. In the second part of this chapter, we consider evidence for gender differences in emotions, and examine which contexts reinforce and which decrease stereotypical gender differences.

### ***Crying, Sadness, and Depression***

Various studies have shown that female adolescents and adults report crying more often than their male counterparts (Hess et al., 2000; Lombardo, Cretser, & Roesch, 2001; Vingerhoets & Scheirs, 2000). This is a universal phenomenon, found in many countries around the world (Becht, Poortinga, & Vingerhoets, 2001; Fischer et al., 2004), although the size of this difference varies.

Because this pattern of gender differences in crying is universal, it has often been explained in terms of biological differences between men and women, namely an increased release of the hormone prolactin in women, which lowers the threshold for crying (e.g., Vingerhoets & Scheirs, 2000). This reasoning is consistent with, but not conclusively supported by the fact that sex differences in crying become larger during puberty, that women cry more during the premenstrual period and during menstruation, and that women cry more during pregnancy. The research to date, however, has not provided a direct link between prolactin and crying.

Another explanation relates to the influence of gender-specific socialization pressure, suggesting that boys start suppressing their crying when they become aware that crying does not fit their masculine identity. This idea finds support in developmental differences in crying, at least in Western countries. Whereas newborn boys and girls hardly differ in crying, gender differences in crying proneness slowly evolve during childhood and boys and girls are markedly different by the age of around 11. Van Tilburg, Unterberg, and Vingerhoets (2002) found that girls cry more frequently than boys in all age groups (from 11 to 16), but the difference increases with age, mainly due to the fact that boys' crying decreases over time. Changes in hormonal levels, as indicated by the start of the girls' menstruation, did not affect crying frequency so cannot explain this shift across time.

A third explanation relates to the emotional states resulting in crying. There is some evidence that women cry in different situations and as an expression of different emotions than do men (Vingerhoets & Scheirs, 2000). Whereas women cry more often in conflict situations, or when they feel powerless fury, men cry more often after positive events, such as male comradeship, the winning of their favorite sports team, and after the birth of their child. Women are also reported to suffer more often from depression than men (Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994). In contrast with depressive men, who tend to engage

themselves in distracting activities, women have a greater tendency to ruminate, share, and express their feelings (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). This behavior strengthens feelings of irrelevance and inferiority and may result in more crying, compared to men's coping strategy. Still another emotional state that has more often been reported in women than men and may be an explanation of gender difference in crying, is women's greater feeling of empathy. Girls at a young age already show more sadness and sympathetic vocalizations than boys, and women score higher on empathy scales than do men (e.g., Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Hoffman, 1977; Wheelwright et al., 2006). This means that women may be more inclined to cry when interacting with others who feel sad, or who cry, because they immerse themselves more in the sadness of the other person than do men. Taking the perspective of the other person makes it easier to embody this person's feelings.

These findings that women more often seem to cry in a greater variety of situations or interactions raises the question of why people cry. Crying has generally been considered as the ultimate sign of helplessness, because it signals the inability to act in order to cope with a situation (Frijda, 1986). Thus, crying out of sadness or frustration typically signals helplessness, but extremely positive situations may also trigger tears because they make one aware of one's own futility, such as when being reunited with friends or family after a long period of hardship; or when winning an extremely difficult, high-ranked sports match. The feelings that are evoked in such situations are being overwhelmed by the magnificence or beauty of an event.

Although this has never been directly tested, we may assume that women's traditional social role may more often elicit feelings of powerlessness, for example evoked in marital conflicts, but also feelings of depression and empathy. In addition to signaling helplessness, however, crying may also be seen as a scream for attention, indicating that one needs support or comfort. From this perspective

crying may have more positive consequences for women than for men, such as being helped, forgiven, or supported. Female tears may thus have a greater positive impact than male tears, although this clearly also depends on the context (e.g., Fischer, Eagly, & Oosterwijk, 2013).

Finally, these findings also point to a methodological explanation, namely the effects of social desirability. Given the different norms for male and female crying, men may be more reluctant to admit, or even recollect crying episodes than women. In addition, men and women may use different definitions of crying, where women would refer to tears welling up in their eyes, or lumps in their throat, whereas men would not define this as crying. Such social desirability effects clearly boost the sex difference in crying.

### ***Smiling: Happy or Pleasing***

A second stereotypical belief is that women smile more than men (e.g., Stoppard & Gunn Gruchy, 1993; Timmers et al., 2003). Although smiles may have the general function of smoothing social interactions, they may serve as vehicles with which powerless or submissive individuals can show their affiliation to another person. A smile reflects a positive signal, which may range from agreement, to encouragement, attention for the other person, or hiding one's own negative feelings. Smiling functions as social glue, especially for those who need to get things done or who simply want to please others. Women have indeed often been found to smile more than men (Hall, 1984; Hall, Carter, & Horgan, 2000; LaFrance & Hecht, 2000; LaFrance, Hecht, & Paluck, 2003).

An obvious explanation for this gender difference is that women just feel happier and that their more frequent smiling is a reflection of their emotional state. A review by Alexander and Wood (2000) indeed shows that women report more intense positive emotions than men. However, this difference in positive emotions depends on the social relational context, and appears to be true only for married

women. We can only speculate about these findings, and more detailed research is needed to explore this relationship between marriage and happiness. Married women may simply be more content about their lives than unmarried women, but the difference may be due also to an adjustment to social norms, that one should be happy to be married.

A classic explanation for the difference in smiling is the subordination hypothesis (Henley, 1977), whereby smiling, and other nonverbal behaviors, such as gazing, interpersonal distance, touching and nodding, stems from gender differences in dominance and power. A dominant versus submissive position influences specific nonverbal behaviors, which further emphasize these positions. Henley's subordination hypothesis has evoked many debates about the role of power and status; however, the empirical evidence needed to diagnose its validity is inconsistent (e.g., LaFrance & Hecht, 2000). Whether women's more frequent smiling can be explained in terms of status or power therefore remains a question.

Gender differences in smiling also vary with other aspects of the social context. LaFrance and colleagues (2000, 2003) have demonstrated that both proximate and more distal factors influence the size of the gender difference in smiling (LaFrance & Hecht, 2000; LaFrance et al., 2003). They identified three core contextual factors: gender-based norms, situational constraints, and the salience of emotion. First, the likelihood of smiling depends on gender-specific norms that vary across cultures and with age. For example, young women smile much more than young men, but this difference decreases with age. This may be explained by the fact that gender display rules are especially powerful during adolescence when boys and girls create their own gender identity. These rules are especially prevalent when people are aware of being evaluated or observed, and also when they interact with strangers (rather than friends).

Second, the goals and demands in a given interaction may affect how much one smiles.



If men's and women's behavior is constrained by similar roles or tasks, for example, when they both occupy a care-taking role, sex differences are small. Likewise, in situations where men or women have either high or low power, gender differences in smiling are small, because the role requires a certain amount of smiling. Leaders simply smile less than service personnel, whether male or female. However, in situations of average power, for example a meeting with colleagues, larger gender differences are found, because there are fewer prescriptions, and there is more room to behave according to one's own (gender-specific) norms.

Third, LaFrance and colleagues (2003) have argued that sex differences should be larger in situations that evoke negative emotions, such as when there is social tension or when self-disclosure is encouraged, because in such situations women are typically required to do more 'emotion work' than men. This is not necessarily true though in situations where one's own negative distress needs to be regulated. For example, Ansfield (2007) showed that men not only reported more negative affect than women while viewing very distressing videos, but they also smiled more, especially when others were present. In such situations, men are expected to remain aloof and they therefore need to regulate their stress more than women. Here, the emotion work mainly focuses on oneself and therefore is different from the emotion work that is required in regulating others' emotions or in conversations.

In short, although women generally tend to smile more than men, the size of this gender difference clearly depends on immediate social interactions, and the broader cultural context that specifies the content of gender-specific norms.

### ***The Aggressive Male and Female***

So far we have focused on stereotypical female emotions, but what about emotions that are more stereotypical of men? When considering the emotions that are typical for male

gender roles, we expect men to show more anger, but also more pride, as a signal of achievement orientation and competition. As pride is the emotion that implies superiority over others, this emotion should go hand-in-hand with self-perceived competence or efficacy. A meta-analysis on the relation between gender and self-conscious emotions (Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison, & Morton, 2012) concludes that there is no empirical evidence for gender differences in pride, however. Another emotion that could be associated more strongly with male roles is contempt, as contempt entails looking down on others, seeing others as inferior, and can thus be associated with power. The few studies that have included contempt did not report any gender differences either (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). Because anger is a frequently examined emotion, we will review the evidence for gender differences in the experience and expression of this emotion.

Anger is assumed to be a stereotypical 'male' emotion, yet there is no evidence that men are angry more often than women, or that their feelings of anger are stronger. Studies measuring the subjective experience of anger in reaction to a specific event do not show large or systematic differences in anger experience. Only when the event is related to stereotypical male or female concerns, for example negative feedback about one's intelligence versus one's physical appearance, do differences between men and women arise.

On the basis of our social contextual framework, however, we would especially expect gender differences in the expression of anger. Within their stereotypical female role, women would be less inclined to directly attack another person. Instead, they should show their anger in a less confrontational manner, because they are more concerned with the interpersonal harm caused by their anger expression, and less convinced by the effectiveness and appropriateness of anger displays than are men (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). This is supported by various meta-analyses and reviews showing that from a young age onwards men engage in more physical

aggression and slightly more verbal aggression than do women (Archer, 2004; Archer, Pearson, & Westeman, 1988; Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Frodi, Macauley, & Thome, 1977; Hyde, 1984). In addition, and also in line with our expectations, a meta-analysis on relational or social aggression shows an opposite effect. This indirect form of aggression, in which individuals express their anger by ignoring or gossiping about their anger targets, appears to be more typical of girls and women (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

This pattern of gender differences in aggression can be explained by women's greater concern about others' reactions, in line with their communal perspective, but also with their subordinate position in traditional gender roles. Women more often perceive potential danger, such as retaliation (Bettencourt & Miller, 1996; Eagly & Steffen, 1984), or they may be more concerned with keeping harmony within the relationship and both motives would lead to the suppression or indirect expression of their anger. In an experimental study Evers and colleagues (2005) showed that such social motives indeed resulted in a more indirect aggressive reaction. Respondents were angered by receiving negative feedback on a task while either expecting or not expecting to meet the person who provided the feedback. Women reported more negative social expectations, and delivered less hot sauce (as a measure of interpersonal aggression) than men. However, this occurred only when they expected to interact with the provoker, suggesting that women were more anxious about potential harm from their anger.

The idea that women would regulate their anger such that it would not hurt the relationship with the other person appears to be at odds with findings showing that women express their anger more directly in intimate settings (Archer, 2000; Fischer, Rodriguez Mosquera, van Vianen, & Manstead, 2004). However, these studies show that women's expression of anger is related to their social role (see also Kopper & Epperson, 1991). In traditional role contexts women are less

inclined to express their anger than in more egalitarian role contexts (e.g., Fischer & Evers, 2011), which fits with the idea that anger is regulated in such a way that it fits one's social role. In egalitarian contexts, women and men have more similar positions, and thus women should appraise the potential danger of their anger expression as less than in traditional role contexts (see also Archer, 2000).

Thus, various aspects of the social context, including one's relationship with the other person, the expected negative consequences of one's anger, the expected effectiveness of one's anger influence the size and direction of gender differences in anger expressions. In addition, the perceived appropriateness of one's anger expression may also contribute to gender differences in the regulation of one's anger. Studies by Campbell and colleagues for example (Campbell & Muncer, 1987; Driscoll, Zinkiviskay, Evans, & Campbell, 2006), have shown that women tend to see their anger expressions more as a loss of control than do men, who are more inclined to view their anger expression as instrumental. Such different perspectives on one's own anger may also result in more anger regulation by women, especially because anger may negatively affect others. All these different factors may explain why some studies found women expressing more anger than men, while others found the opposite pattern, and still others do not find any difference (for an overview, see Evers, Fischer, & Manstead, 2011; Fischer & Evers, 2011; Kring, 2000).

### ***Interim Conclusion***

In sum, clear evidence with regard to a differential pattern of subjective emotional experiences in men and women is lacking. In terms of daily experience, women do not report more, or more intense, emotions than do men. Whether differences in self-reported emotions are found depends on the type of measures used and the type of questions asked. In general, specific measures administered shortly after the event are least likely to

be affected by self-stereotyping and thus show least gender differences (e.g., Robinson & Clore, 2002; Robinson, Johnson & Shields, 1998). With regard to specific expression of emotions, most studies support the assumption that women more often express those emotions that confirm their alleged emotionality, such as crying and smiling. Men, on the other hand, show more emotions that suggest that they are rational and in control, such as when they express their anger directly. There are also many situations in which men and women show similar emotions, which are then interpreted as support for women's emotionality and rejection of men's emotionality (see also Barrett & Bliss-Moreau, 2009). The research reviewed here shows that gender differences in emotional reactions are moderated by social contextual factors, and that the presence and size of gender differences is contingent upon the nature of the expression, the social demands of the situation and the goals at hand.

### **EMOTIONAL OR EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT?**

As we have argued, the concept of emotionality is generally associated with an inappropriate display of emotions, presumably due to a lack of control. This stands in contrast with the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI; Salovey & Mayer, 1990), which refers to the adequate expression, regulation, and recognition of emotions. Interestingly, in addition to being more emotional, women are also assumed to be more emotionally intelligent than are men. Before discussing the paradox of both claims, we will first review evidence for women's allegedly superior emotional intelligence.

Some studies have found that women score higher than men on general EI measures (Van Rooy, Alonson, & Viswesvaran, 2005), particularly on performance-based EI tests, such as social skills (Petrides & Furnham, 2006), compared to self-report tests (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Indeed, some studies have

found that men estimate their EI as higher than women (Petrides & Furnham, 2006). This may suggest that women are more aware of the complexities of emotional life, and thus take the limitations of their own emotional competence into account, which in itself may be seen as a sign of emotional intelligence. It may also point to a general bias related to the more positive self-esteem of men, compared to women, and consequently merely indicate that women are less accurate than men in estimating their own emotional intelligence.

If we look more specifically at the different components of EI (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000), we find the following evidence. One component refers to the expression and recognition of emotions. Research first of all shows that women are more facially expressive than are men, as measured with facial EMG (electromyography) (Dimberg & Lundqvist, 1988; Kring & Gordon, 1998). In addition to showing emotions on the face, women also tend to talk more about their personal feelings than do men. Research on self-disclosure shows a clear sex difference in favor of women (see Carli, Chapter 13 this volume). Given that mothers more often talk about emotions, at least with their daughters (Fivush, 1989), by the age of two, girls already produce more emotion words than do boys (Dunn, Bretherton, & Munn, 1987). Block (1973) also found that parents more often encourage boys to be assertive (aggressive), but not emotional (i.e., crying), whereas girls are taught the reverse.

As women are more emotionally expressive, it is not a surprise that their emotional facial expressions are also better recognized, even when posed (Hall, 1984; Ramsey, Langlois, & Marti, 2005). Sometimes an exception has been found for the recognition of anger and contempt, which is better recognized in men's faces, presumably because they pose a bigger threat (Goos & Silverman, 2002). Women are found to be better decoders of emotion as well (Hall, 1984; Hall, Carter, & Horgan, 2000; McClure, 2000). In various studies with adult respondents women generally show greater accuracy in recognizing

emotions than do men, although differences are not always consistent. The size of the gender difference may be due to the nature of the stimuli. For example, women score higher on the 'Reading the Mind in the Eyes' test, which assesses recognition of subtle emotions from the eyes only (Baron-Cohen et al., 2001). Hall and Matsumoto (2004) also examined sex differences in decoding facial stimuli that were presented very quickly and showed that women were even more accurate with these very subtle displays of emotion. Women therefore seem to do better than men in emotion recognition based on more intuitive or implicit processes.

Various hypotheses have been advanced to explain these gender differences in emotion decoding. A classic hypothesis is based on the development of gender-specific competencies in our evolutionary past. Because traditionally women care for their children, they should therefore be more sensitive to nonverbal signals that require their attention and action. A second hypothesis is Henley's subordination hypothesis that explains better decoding ability from women's lower status and power (Henley, 1977). This hypothesis is supported by recent research, which shows that powerless individuals do perform better in emotion recognition tasks (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006; Kraus, Côté, & Keltner, 2010). It is argued that powerless individuals are more motivated to attend to others who may control their outcomes, whereas powerful individuals tend not to pay attention to such information (Fiske, 1993).

Our social contextual framework supports both explanations. Paying attention to and learning to correctly interpret facial expressions is part of a life-long process that may be emphasized more in female than in male roles. In addition, situational and role demands may enhance or inhibit women's motivation to pay attention to the other's emotion, for example due to their power position, or to relationship goals.

There is one important exception to women's better decoding skills, which is men's better detection of subtle nonverbal

micro-expressions, i.e., nonverbal leakage, which, while already present at a young age, increases during adolescence (Elfenbein, Marsh, & Ambadi, 2002; Rosenthal & DePaulo, 1979). One explanation for this apparent contradictory set of findings is related to gender differences in social motives in the interaction. For example, men may be more motivated to detect lies in competitive settings, whereas women may be motivated to have a good relationship with the other person, and thus not to see antagonistic emotions, such as anger or contempt on another person's face. More research would be needed to know whether the inference of emotions from faces and the judgment of genuineness is indeed dependent on the social goals and tasks at hand.

### ***Emotion Knowledge and Emotion Regulation***

Another important component of EI is emotion knowledge. Is there any evidence that women have more fine-grained emotion knowledge than men? Emotion knowledge refers to the ability to identify and describe discrete emotions, and more particularly to be able to differentiate between various emotional states and to verbalize them with discrete terms. This would lead to more awareness about one's own emotions and the ability to regulate them. Indeed, there are studies showing that women have enhanced autobiographical memory for emotional events (Seidlitz & Diener, 1998). Although women's interest in their own and others' emotions seems larger than men's, which is reflected in their self-stereotyping as more affectively intense, open, and sensitive to their feelings (Barrett, Robin, Pietromonaco, & Eyssell, 1998), there is to date little empirical evidence that women actually know more about emotions and effectively use this knowledge better than do men.

One of the recognized measures assessing emotion knowledge is the LEAS (Level of Emotional Awareness Scale; Lane et al., 1990), where respondents write verbal reports in

response to a scenario in which a protagonist is part of an emotional event. Degree of complexity of emotion knowledge is scored, with general affective terms coded with low scores, and very specific emotion labels coded with high scores. Several studies have found sex differences in the LEAS (Barrett, Lane, Sechrest, & Schwartz, 2000; Feldman & Bliss-Moreau, 2009; Ciarrochi, Hynes, & Crittenden, 2005) with women using more complex and fine-grained emotion terms than men. This sex difference in emotion knowledge is not explained by sex differences in verbal intelligence. Thus, women's competence in differentiating the various nuances of emotional life is independent of their generally better linguistic abilities. Importantly, the sex difference in emotional awareness disappears when experiences are made more self-relevant (Lindquist & Barrett, 2008). This suggests that women use their emotion knowledge more when talking about emotions, whether their own or others', whereas men mainly make use of this knowledge when talking about their own emotions. There is, however, little research on the nature and application of emotion knowledge, or on how men and women make use of this knowledge.

A final important component of Emotional Intelligence is the regulation of emotion (Gross, 2007). The stereotype that women are the more emotional sex implies that they are less competent in controlling their emotions, however, the assumption that women are more emotionally intelligent suggests that they are better at regulating and adjusting their emotions. This apparent contradiction may be due to the fact that women and men have different regulation motives. For example, women may only downregulate their emotions if they expect negative consequences for others, such as in the case of aggressive or uncontrollable anger, whereas men regulate their emotions primarily to strengthen their reputation or masculinity. Empirical evidence on gender differences in (motives for) emotion regulation is scarce and inconsistent (see McCrae, Ochsner,

Mauss, Gabrieli, & Gross, 2008). The fact that men and women may report emotions with different intensities in different situations certainly need not imply that one sex is better at regulating than the other, because these differences may simply be the result of gender-appropriate emotion norms.

## CONCLUSION

The belief that women are the emotional sex is widespread in Western society. It suggests that women have stronger and more frequent emotions, but empirical evidence does not support this general difference. The persistence of women's supposed emotionality seems partly due to the fact that women more often tend to display those emotions that constitute the key elements of emotionality, such as crying. In addition, women's social networks provide an excellent base for expressing and sharing emotions and such conversations may further nourish the belief that women are the more emotional sex. Believing that women are emotional also directs interpretation of emotional reactions as reflecting an emotional personality, whereas this is less the case for men.

We have argued that gender differences in emotional reactions are determined first of all by distal factors, such as gender-specific norms and stereotypes that have evolved in specific cultures, and these are loosely based on gender differences in the engagement in social roles. Because social roles are partly connected to physical differences between the sexes, some aspects of the gendered social roles, such as the primary responsibility for the care for children, are relatively universal, although there is huge variability in the involvement of men in these tasks. General gender differences in emotional responding, such as the more frequent crying and smiling by women, and the more frequent direct anger expressions by men, can be seen as the incarnation of gender-specific social roles related to childcare or relationship management, or to competition and achievement.



Second, gender differences in emotional responding are also determined by the specific context. Some contexts may evoke gender-inconsistent norms and goals, such as sport contexts, where men are allowed to cry when their team has lost and women are allowed to be aggressive when they want to win the competition. In other contexts, gender-specific norms may be more or less absent, such as during a funeral, when everyone is allowed to cry, or during a graduation ceremony, where everyone is supposed to cheer. In still other contexts, such as in intimate relations, the specific goals in the relationship may be primary in shaping one's emotional reaction, resulting in women showing their anger more directly than men. Thus, specific contexts can evoke norms, motives, goals or emotions that may elicit, but also override, stereotypical gender differences.

Finally, emotion expressions may differ in functionality for men and women in specific situations. Women may express their sadness, frustration or concern, because they see no reason to suppress these emotions, and because they want to share their feelings. Men may do the opposite in some contexts, because they do not want to be seen as emotional. The emotionality stereotype may thus operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy in the regulation of emotion. There is also evidence suggesting that women are more aware of their own and others' emotions and that they are better in using their emotions to everyone's benefit. This female advantage has been recognized in various work domains, and resulted, for example, in the plea for more women in the top of organizations. It is possible, however, that the acknowledgement of their emotional competence may not only strengthen beliefs of women as the emotional experts, but also as the emotional sex.

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# Gendered Communication and Social Influence

Linda L. Carli

## INTRODUCTION

Do women speak differently than men? In popular writing on gender and communication, books such as Deborah Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* (1990) and John Gray's book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (1992), women and girls are characterized as speaking in a pleasant, supportive, and agreeable manner, and being good listeners. Men and boys, on the other hand, are characterized as speaking directly and assertively, and being effective at winning arguments and exerting influence. These popular books about gender and language resonate with everyday beliefs about how men and women communicate and correspond closely to cultural stereotypes about gender. Cross-cultural research shows that people generally agree on what men and women are like (e.g., Williams & Best, 1990). People perceive women to be warm, kind, helpful, and supportive – a cluster of traits that reflect the general perception that women are highly communal and concerned with the needs and feelings of others. In contrast, people perceive

men to be leader-like, directive, powerful, and competent – traits that reflect the belief that men are more agentic and status-asserting (Hall & Carter, 1999).

In this chapter I review the literature on gender differences in communication, focusing on patterns of communication that might correspond to traditional gender stereotypes – that women show greater communality and other-directedness in their communications and men greater agency and self-assertion. In addition, I examine gender differences in social influence and assess how any differences in the way men and women communicate affect these gender effects.

Clearly, there is considerable overlap in the communication styles of women and men. The goal of this analysis is not to deny the similarities in female and male speech, but rather to explore (1) what differences exist and how extensive those differences are, (2) whether the differences fit expectations based on gender stereotypes, and (3) what factors moderate or mediate those differences.



## GENDER AND COMMUNICATION

### **Total Talk**

One common stereotype about gender and speech is that women talk more than men (James & Drakich, 1993). In an international poll covering 22 countries, in every country participants rated women as the more talkative gender (Gallup International, 1996). Despite the apparent universality of this stereotype, research reveals that, if anything, across a wide variety of social and professional contexts adult men talk *more* overall than do adult women (James & Drakich, 1993). A recent meta-analysis of 70 comparisons of gender differences in amount of speech revealed a small effect in the male direction ( $d = -0.14$ ; Leaper & Ayres, 2007). The size of the gender effect did vary, depending on the particular measure of talkativeness used in the studies. Men had longer speaking times ( $d = -0.24$ ), used more words per speaking turn ( $d = -0.37$ ), and produced more statements ( $d = -0.28$ ) than women did. No difference was found for the total number of words used and women exceeded men only for one measure of talkativeness: total turns ( $d = 0.40$ ). Of course, turn-taking differs from the other measures of talkativeness in that it not only reflects the extent to which someone contributes to an interaction, but also reflects the extent to which he or she gives up the floor to others. Thus, turn-taking appears to have a more communal quality than the other indices.

Gender differences in talkativeness have been examined in children as well as adults. Unlike adults, however, children do not show greater male talkativeness. On the contrary, a meta-analysis of gender differences among children from preschool age through adolescence revealed overall slightly greater talkativeness among girls than boys ( $d = 0.11$ ; Leaper & Smith, 2004). When examining different measures of talkativeness, small but consistent results emerged: there were no effects of gender on total speaking time, but girls used slightly more words overall

( $d = 0.13$ ) and slightly more words per speaking turn ( $d = 0.15$ ) than did boys.

The gender effects among children appear to contradict those among adults, but an important consideration when examining children's speech is the finding that girls show greater verbal precocity than boys do. Studies in the United States and other countries have revealed that girls acquire language earlier than boys do; among children under three years of age, girls are superior in vocabulary comprehension and language production (e.g., Bleses et al., 2008; Feldman et al., 2000). Thus, any gender differences in talkativeness could be due to a basic maturational difference between girls and boys in early childhood. Consistent with this hypothesis, when the effect of age on children's speech was examined, greater female speech emerged only for very young children – those between the ages of 12 and 35 months (Leaper & Smith, 2004).

In general, the findings on adults and children show little evidence of greater female talkativeness, except that girls tend to speak earlier than boys. Instead, results indicate that men tend to speak more than women. That men take more speech time and contribute more statements, even though men and women use the same number of words and women take more turns, suggests that women's contributions may have different content than men's. Women's more frequent turn-taking may be a means of showing support for other speakers whereas men may primarily be contributing task information. Alternatively, women may take more turns because they are interrupted more.

### **Communal versus Agentic Speech**

The total amount an individual speaks is associated with the possession of formal leadership, status or authority, or being dominant (Mullen, Salas, & Driskell, 1989; Schmid Mast, 2002), and can therefore be seen as an index of agency. However, speech has a multitude of functions and can just as easily convey communion. To assess more

precisely whether language is communal or agentic requires examination of the content of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Research comparing the content of male and female speech reveals gender effects that are consistent with traditional gender stereotypes. Gender differences in agentic versus communal language begin as early as preschool. Studies have shown that boys use talk to compete with and control their peers – essentially creating a status hierarchy within their group. In contrast, girls use talk to establish and maintain relationships and equalize differences among their peers (e.g., Leman, Ahmed, & Ozarow, 2005; Sheldon, 1990). Other studies that have assessed gender differences in conversations have found that boys try to gain the floor whereas girls encourage others to speak (Austin, Salehi, & Leffler, 1987), boys insult others and brag more than do girls (Goodwin, 1990; McCloskey, 1996), boys make more intrusive interruptions than do girls (Leman et al., 2005), and girls use more mitigating language than do boys (Goodwin, 1997; Sachs, 1987).

In the meta-analysis of children's language use, researchers compared boys' and girls' use of affiliative speech, which includes praising, acknowledging, and agreeing with others, and assertive speech, which includes disagreeing, issuing directives, and offering information or opinions (Leaper & Smith, 2004). Small gender differences emerged; girls used more affiliative language ( $d = 0.26$ ) and boys used more assertive language ( $d = 0.11$ ). Thus, overall, girls show greater sensitivity to their conversation partners, whereas boys more often attempt to assert their status and control, reflecting the predicted gender differences in communion and agency.

The differences reported among children also occur among adults. Interactions among men tend to be more hierarchical than interactions among women (Grainger & Dunbar, 2009; Schmid Mast, 2001). A meta-analysis of studies examining gender differences in affiliative and assertive speech revealed small effects; men use more assertive language than

do women ( $d = 0.09$ ) and women use more affiliative language than do men ( $d = 0.12$ ; Leaper & Ayres, 2007). These differences disappeared in interactions among friends, romantic partners, and family members. In addition, when particular types of assertive language were examined, the results were somewhat mixed. Men make more suggestions and task contributions than women make, but women criticize others more than men do; men and women are equally likely to disagree, issue directives, and contribute information. Examination of particular types of affiliative language revealed results that more closely followed the predicted gender effects. Women show more active understanding of others, express more support and solidarity, and communicate more approval and praise. No gender effects were found in the extent to which women and men agree with others or acknowledge that they are listening. Thus it appears from these results that women show more communion than men, but men are primarily more agentic in communicating task information rather than exhibiting dominance or control. Nevertheless, for some communication behaviors men do show higher dominance and control than women do. For example, a meta-analytic review of gender differences in interrupting revealed that men interrupt others slightly more than women do overall ( $d = 0.15$ ), and particularly when the interruptions are intrusive and used to gain the floor in conversations ( $d = 0.33$ ; Anderson & Leaper, 1998). Men also display more visual dominance than women do; visual dominance conveys power and authority and is measured as the ratio of the amount of time that people maintain eye contact while talking to the amount of time that they maintain eye contact while listening to others (Dovidio, Brown, Heltman, Ellyson, & Keating, 1988; Dovidio, Ellyson, Keating, Heltman, & Brown, 1988).

Gender differences have also been found in the amount of mitigation (e.g., adding tag questions or hedges, such as 'sort of,' to statements) in the speech of adults. A meta-analysis of 29 studies examining gender differences in

mitigated speech revealed a small effect ( $d = 0.23$ ), with greater tentativeness or mitigation in women's language than in men's (Leaper & Robnett, 2011). Some scholars have argued that mitigated speech can be used to encourage others to participate in interactions and maintain pleasant interactions (Fishman, 1980; Holmes, 1995). And in one organizational experiment, subordinates rated managers as more satisfying to work for when the managers used a moderate amount or a great deal of mitigated language rather than none at all (Geddes, 1992). Nevertheless, research indicates that mitigated language is generally perceived as conveying incompetence or powerlessness (see Grob, Meyers, & Schuh, 1997; Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999), and thus reflects low agency.

In contrast to men's dominant and hierarchical interactions, women's communications tend to create equality among group members and emphasize maintaining harmonious relationships. For example, communications in groups of women have more equal verbal participation among members (Aries, 1976; Schmid Mast, 2001) and women more often share leadership than do men (Berdahl & Anderson, 2005). One means of maintaining equal participation is to encourage others to speak by verbally or nonverbally reinforcing the contributions of others (i.e., by nodding and by giving minimal verbal contributions that encourage others, such as saying 'right' and 'mm hmm'). Verbal reinforcement does increase the speech of conversation partners (Hannah & Murachver, 1999, 2007), and, consistent with women's greater communal style, women reinforce others more than men do (e.g., Farley, Ashcraft, Stasson, & Nusbaum, 2010; Hannah & Murachver, 2007; Helweg-Larsen, Cunningham, Carrico, & Pergram, 2004).

Women's communications are generally warmer and more intimate than men's. For example, women speak more politely than men do, issuing more compliments and apologies (Holmes, 1995). In addition, a large meta-analytic review of gender differences in self-disclosure revealed that women

self-disclose personal information slightly more than men ( $d = 0.18$ ; Dindia & Allen, 1992). A meta-analytic review of gender differences in smiling revealed that women ( $d = 0.41$ ) smile more than men (LaFrance, Hecht, & Paluck, 2003). Just as with mitigated language, there is some disagreement about whether smiling reflects low agency or high communion. Although some theorists consider smiling a form of appeasement or low status rather than a sign of warmth, a meta-analysis examining the relation of smiling with measures of actual status, power, or social rank found no relation between smiling and status (Hall, Coats, & LeBeau, 2005). Thus it appears that smiling reflects warmth more than appeasement and the gender difference in smiling corresponds to greater communion in women than men.

Greater female communion has also been found in research comparing male and female leaders. Meta-analytic reviews of gender differences in leadership style have revealed that female leaders emphasize democratic rather than autocratic leadership behavior ( $d = 0.22$ ; Eagly & Johnson, 1990) and lead in a slightly more transformational style than men do ( $d = 0.10$ ; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Democratic leadership involves effective listening, showing respect for others, encouraging others to contribute their ideas, and acknowledging their contributions (Gastil, 1994). Transformational leadership involves inspiring, teaching, mentoring, and supporting subordinates by communicating enthusiasm, a sense of collective mission, and encouragement. Thus, compared with male leaders, female leaders communicate in ways that are supportive of subordinates and that focus on maintaining interpersonal relationships. Leadership research shows little evidence of greater male agency, probably because leadership roles generally call for agentic behavior and social norms dictate that leaders take charge and exert authority. Male and female leaders do not differ in the extent to which they focus on making task contributions (Eagly & Johnson, 1990).

Overall, then, research findings on the pattern of gender differences in communication generally reflect expectations based on gender stereotypes. Men's communications reflect greater male agency whereas women's communications reflect greater female communion. One exception to the general finding that girls are more communal than boys has been reported in studies of indirect aggression, which involves covert or subtle verbal and nonverbal behaviors that ostracize, defame, or bully others (Archer, 2004). Examples of indirect aggression include spreading rumors, embarrassing someone, giving someone a dirty look, or criticizing others behind their backs (see Archer & Coyne, 2005). A meta-analytic review of school, college, and community samples showed no gender effects among younger children, but greater indirect aggression in adolescent girls than adolescent boys and in college and adult women than men. This finding contrasts with findings on gender differences in direct verbal and physical aggression, where boys and men show higher levels of aggression than girls and women, regardless of age (Archer, 2004).

## **MODERATORS OF GENDER DIFFERENCES IN AGENTIC AND COMMUNAL COMMUNICATIONS**

### ***Gender Composition Effects***

Gender differences in communal and agentic speech are consistent with stereotypes about typical male and female behavior, but the differences are affected by a number of moderating factors. One important moderator involves the gender composition of the interaction. That is, gender differences in communication depend not only on the gender of the actor, but also on the gender of the target of the actor's communications.

Although the research on children provides little evidence of gender composition effects (Leaper & Smith, 2004), research on adults has typically revealed that both men and

women exhibit greater communion when interacting with women than with men. Women receive more compliments and apologies from both genders than do men (Holmes, 1995). Moreover, a meta-analysis of gender effects on smiling has established that the gender difference, with women smiling more than men, is greater in same- than mixed-gender interactions (LaFrance et al., 2003). Thus, both men and women smile more at women than at men. Other meta-analyses have likewise found larger gender effects in communal language in same-gender interactions than mixed-gender interactions. This is true, for example, for affiliative speech, where a regression analysis of moderator effects in the meta-analysis revealed greater gender differences in same- than mixed-gender interactions (Leaper & Ayres, 2007). Likewise, the meta-analysis on self-disclosure revealed that the gender difference was larger in same-gender interactions, with men and women self-disclosing more to women than to men (Dindia & Allen, 1992). Gender composition effects have also emerged in the use of verbal reinforcers. Studies have shown that gender differences in verbal reinforcement occur more in same- than mixed-gender interactions, with women verbally reinforcing others more than men do (Bilous & Krauss, 1988; Carli, 1990; Marche & Peterson, 1993). A study examining the vocal tone present in conversations revealed that people had more pleasant voices when conversing with women than when conversing with men (Hall & Braunwald, 1981) and another study revealed that people's speech was friendlier when interacting with women than men (Moskowitz, 1993). Overall, then, both men and women appear to use more communal language when interacting with women, and as a result gender differences in communal communications are more pronounced in same-gender interactions than in mixed-gender interactions.

Gender effects on agentic communications also depend on gender-composition, but the pattern of findings is opposite to that of communal speech. Gender differences in

behaviors conveying varying degrees of dominance emerge more strongly in mixed-gender interactions. For example, the gender differences in visual dominance (Ellyson, Dovidio, & Brown, 1992) and in mitigated speech (Carli, 1990; McMillan, Clifton, McGrath, & Gale, 1977), are most pronounced when gender is salient (Reid, Keerie, & Palomares, 2003) and in mixed-gender interactions. Here, men display less mitigation and more visual dominance in interactions with women than with men, and women display more mitigation and less visual dominance in interactions with men than with women.

A recent organizational study that explored visual dominance among members of workplace teams found similar results. The higher the percentage of men on the teams, the lower the teams' level of visual dominance; that is, team members showed less visual dominance toward other members to the extent that there were more male members on the team (Koch, Baehne, Kruse, Zimmerman, & Zumbach, 2010). Other studies on non-student male samples have likewise revealed that men speak in a more mitigated manner when talking to other men than when talking to women (Brouer, Gerritsen, & de Haan, 1979; Sayers & Sherblom, 1987). Consistent with the notion that talkativeness reflects agency, the gender difference in amount of speech also shows this composition effect. Men's greater talkativeness occurs in mixed-gender but not in same-gender interactions (Hannah & Murachver, 2007; Leaper & Ayres, 2007). Although the regression analysis of moderator effects in the meta-analysis did not reveal gender composition effects for assertive speech (Leaper & Ayres, 2007), this might be because the index of assertive speech included behaviors that varied in direction, with greater criticism among women and greater task behavior among men.

Results of studies on gender composition effects suggest that interactions with women involve more communal language than interactions with men, whereas interactions with

men involve less agentic language than those with women. Why would this be? Perhaps people modify their style of communication based on their stereotypes about how men and women are expected to behave. People may expect interactions with women to be particularly warm, pleasant, and friendly, and lacking in dominance or competition, which, as a result, may elicit communal behavior in turn. On the other hand, the tendency to communicate in a more mitigated and less agentic manner to men may reflect men's greater status and power compared with women (see Carli, 1999).

### ***Effects of Power on Gender Differences in Communication***

The extent to which people modify their language may depend not only on their assumptions about how the other person is likely to behave, but also on their relative power in the interaction. Theory relating gender differences in language to differences in power and status has a long history. Nancy Henley, an early proponent of this approach, theorized in her book *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication* (1977) that gender differences in a wide range of nonverbal behaviors derived from men's greater power and authority. The behaviors that have been linked to power include some that convey varying degrees of agency, as well as behaviors that convey communion, such as smiling (e.g., Henley, 1977; LaFrance et al., 2003). Yet there is some debate as to how consistently relative power contributes to differences in communication (see Hall et al., 2005).

A meta-analytic review of the literature testing the association of nonverbal behaviors with verticality, a construct encompassing power, status, and dominance effects, revealed that people perceive stronger links between verticality and communication than actually exist (Hall et al., 2005). Specifically, people perceive possessing high power to be associated with an erect posture and open body position; rapid speech and lower vocal pitch; increased



gazing, nodding, interrupting, gesturing, speech loudness, and touching of others; and decreased speech hesitations, smiling, brow raising, self-touch, and interpersonal distance. However, only three of these behaviors actually correlate with verticality: High-power individuals speak more loudly and have more open bodies and smaller interpersonal distances than low-power individuals. Of course, most of the behaviors included in the review are not stereotypically masculine or feminine and many are not particularly agentic or communal. Moreover, agentic language, in particular, is likely to be influenced by relative status or power, with powerful individuals showing more agency than less powerful individuals. So, focusing more narrowly on agentic communication, is there any evidence that power or status may be associated with any of the gendered language effects?

The meta-analysis by Hall and colleagues (2005) included one behavior that could be considered agentic and for which there is a gender difference: interruption. Although the meta-analysis found no evidence that high-power individuals interrupt more than low-power individuals, it did reveal that high-power individuals are more successful at gaining the floor when they do interrupt. Other studies have also revealed effects of power or status on agentic language for which gender differences have been found. For example, a study of interruption among romantic couples revealed that, regardless of gender, the more powerful partner in the relationship interrupted more than the less powerful partner and the less powerful partner displayed more verbal reinforcement (Kollock, Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1985). Similar results emerged in a study of language in a courtroom, where those who possessed more formal education used less mitigation in their speech than those who possessed less formal education (O'Barr, 1982). These field studies did not manipulate the power or authority of participants and consequently cannot reveal a clear causal connection between status and language. However, experimental studies

indicate that such a relation exists. In an experiment in which participants were assigned to either the role of a leader or a subordinate, those given the leadership position spoke more, were less verbally reinforcing, and used less mitigated language than those assigned to a subordinate position (Johnson, 1994). In a similar experiment in organizational settings, managers communicated more assertively in a role-play interaction with a subordinate when assigned to a position of greater formal authority (Hirokawa, Mickey, & Miura, 1991). These findings demonstrate that possessing legitimate status and power causes participants to increase their agentic language in interactions with those of lower status.

Given that agentic communication can be affected by relative power, is there evidence that power effects can mediate or moderate gender differences in agentic communication? There is. In particular, women's higher status or power is associated with their use of agentic language. For instance, the organizational study of visual dominance in workplace teams revealed that men's visual dominance was unaffected by their status within their teams, but women's visual dominance was higher when they held relatively high group status (Koch et al., 2010). In this case, status was defined as having a formal position of leadership in the group, or having higher levels of education combined with greater past experience as a team member. A causal connection between language and status cannot be made in this study because participants were members of existing teams and not assigned to their group status. Nevertheless, these results are consistent with the experimental studies linking status to agentic speech and suggest that women's speech in particular may vary depending on how much legitimate power and authority they possess.

Just as possessing greater status and authority can increase agentic language, so can high levels of expertise. One experiment found that women hedged less when they were assigned to discuss a familiar rather

than an unfamiliar topic of conversation (McMullen & Pasloski, 1992). In other experiments, women and men assigned at random to work on tasks that favored the expertise of their gender showed higher visual dominance (Dovidio, Brown et al., 1988) and made more task contributions to discussions (Yamada, Tjosvold, & Draguns, 1983) than individuals assigned to work on tasks favoring the other gender. Likewise, Brown, Dovidio, and Ellyson (1990) reported that although men exhibited greater visual dominance than women when participating in a masculine task and less when participating in a feminine task, giving women and men training to improve their expertise at the opposite-gender task caused them to increase their visual dominance, eliminating the gender differences. In a similar way, giving women greater experience with a group task was found to increase women's task contributions in the group relative to men (Lockheed & Hall, 1976). In another study of group interaction, simply informing women that they had superior ability at the group task (Wood & Karten, 1986) increased women's proportion of task contributions in the group. These findings indicate that men are advantaged in most contexts, except for those that are explicitly stereotypically feminine. These results suggest that the gender differences in agentic communication derive to some extent from the male advantage in perceived knowledge, power, or authority, but that gender differences in agentic language can be reduced by increasing women's power or expertise relative to men's.

## **GENDER, SOCIAL INFLUENCE, AND COMMUNICATION**

Most studies examining gender differences in social influence have revealed that men exert greater influence over others' opinions and behavior than women do (e.g., Farley, Ashcraft, Stasson, & Nusbaum, 2010; Hopcroft, 2002; Ward, Seccombe, Bendel, & Carter, 1985). A meta-analysis of 29 studies

found that men are more influential in mixed-gender interactions than are women (Lockheed, 1985). Indeed, influence attempts by women are more likely to fail than are those by men because women's contributions more often are ignored or devalued (Thomas-Hunt & Phillips, 2004; Yoder, Schleicher, & McDonald, 1998). In a vivid illustration of this, an experiment using four-person simulated juries revealed that when specific information was made available to one member of the group, that information was six times more likely to influence the group decision when it was introduced by a man than by a woman (Propp, 1995). Moreover, resistance to female influence begins in early childhood (Jacklin & Maccoby, 1978). Boys make more influence attempts than girls and are more successful in their attempts (Dion & Stein, 1978; Kyratzis & Guo, 1996; Serbin, Sprafkin, Elman, & Doyle, 1982).

Given the gender differences in communication, is there any evidence that the male advantage in social influence is related to men's use of agentic language and women's use of communal language? Some studies have shown that both men and women are more influential when communicating in a gender stereotypical manner, so that men benefit more from using an agentic communication style and women benefit more from using one that is communal (Burgoon, Dillard, & Doran, 1983; Buttner & McEnally, 1996). However, it appears that women experience more serious consequences from violating gender role norms than do men.<sup>1</sup> In fact, a number of studies have found that men receive no penalties for communicating in a feminine manner (Bolino & Turnley, 2003; Carli, 2006; Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995; Copeland, Driskell, & Salas, 1995; Sterling & Owen, 1982). Women, on the other hand, are denigrated when displaying language that is highly agentic rather than communal. A study examining face-to-face discussions of gender-neutral topics revealed that participants expressed more hostility toward a female confederate who disagreed with them than a man who likewise disagreed (Carli, 2006). In

another study, female police officers were rated as less feminine when speaking in an assertive manner more than in a communal style, but male police officers received the same ratings of masculinity regardless of how they communicated (Sterling & Owen, 1982). Similarly, research reveals that a high degree of visual dominance reduces women's likability, but not men's (Copeland et al., 1995). Indeed, female leaders are penalized for being too agentic and lacking communion. A meta-analysis of leader evaluations revealed that female leaders are rated less favorably than their male counterparts for leading in an autocratic rather than a democratic manner (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992).

What is the effect of language on social influence? Men remain influential when they use agentic language, even when that language is highly dominant, but women do not. For example, female speakers who communicate in a threatening or forceful manner exert less influence over their audience than men using the same communication style (e.g., Carli, 2006; Burgoon, Birk, & Hall, 1991; Burgoon et al., 1983). Women who disagree are less influential than men who disagree (Hopcroft, 2002; Troyer, 2001) and visual dominance reduces women's influence, but increases men's (Mehta et al., 1989, cited in Ellyson et al., 1992). Further, this pattern of resisting agentic female influence has been found in studies on children. In an investigation of interactions among toddlers, girls exerted less influence than boys when issuing prohibitions (such as saying 'no' or 'don't'; Jacklin & Maccoby, 1978). In research on preschoolers, girls exerted greater influence when avoiding dominant behaviors, such as issuing orders or disagreeing, and employing more communal language, but boys' influence was unaffected by their communication style (Killen & Naigles, 1995). Likewise, in a study of adult reactions to children's communications, teachers of infants and toddlers more often ignored girls who used forceful or demanding influence attempts (such as screaming or crying) than girls who used

more subtle communications, but responded equally to boys regardless of their communication style (Fagot, Hagan, Leinbach, & Kronsberg, 1985).

Other evidence of penalties for female agency comes from research on self-promotion. Self-promoting behavior should enhance social influence by increasing a person's perceived competence. However, self-promoting behavior can also be seen as immodest and selfish; thus such behavior may increase perceived competence at the expense of perceived communion. Lacking communion does not violate gender-role norms for men, but it does for women. So although self-promotion can benefit men, women receive more favorable reactions for modest rather than self-promoting communications (Giacalone & Riordan, 1990; Rudman, 1998; Wosinska, Dabul, Whetstone-Dion, & Cialdini, 1996) and one study found that self-promoting women were less influential and likable than modest women (Rudman, 1998).

Even behavior that is not particularly dominant but simply highly competent can be problematic for women. For example, although task contributions are typically associated with leader emergence and influence in groups (e.g., Hawkins, 1995; Wood & Karten, 1986), people more often ignore or respond negatively to task contributions by women than by men (Butler & Geis, 1990; Ridgeway, 1982) and women's task contributions have been found to be less influential than men's (Walker, Ilardi, McMahon, & Fennell, 1996).

Although research reveals general resistance to agentic female influence attempts, it appears that men are especially resistant (Carli, 2001), particularly for highly competent behavior. Greater male resistance to female agency and influence has been found in studies on evaluation of leaders (Eagly et al., 1992; Forsyth, Heiney, & Wright, 1997; Rojahn & Willemssen, 1994) and hiring of job candidates (Foschi, Lai, & Sigerson, 1994; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005). Men are more likely than women to dislike and resist the influence of competent or assertive women, instead favoring women

who communicate in less direct or competent ways (Carli, 1990; Carli et al., 1995; Matschiner & Murnen, 1999). Studies reveal that mitigated language can actually increase women's influence with men, in spite of the fact that use of such language by women is associated with a reduction in women's perceived competence (Carli, 1990; Reid et al., 2003). When men yield to a less competent woman it is because they perceive the more competent woman to be threatening or less likable, but women yield to a competent woman over a less competent one (Carli, 1990; Carli et al., 1995).

Previous research has shown that a person's ability to influence others is affected by how competent (Driskell, Olmstead, & Salas, 1993); Holtgraves & Lasky, 1999; Rhoads & Cialdini, 2002) and how likable she or he is (Carli, 1989; Cialdini, 2001; Wood & Kallgren, 1988), suggesting that both women and men would benefit from agentic language, which would enhance perceived competence, and from communal language, which would enhance perceived likability. So why is agentic communication often an obstacle to female influence? It appears that resistance to highly competent or dominant communication in women is due to the perception that such behavior lacks sufficient communion. Consistent with this interpretation, women who combine communal behavior with agentic behavior receive more favorable reactions than those who are merely agentic (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). For example, one study found that women influenced a male audience more when they combined nonverbal warmth (e.g., by smiling and nodding) with competence than when they were merely competent (Carli et al., 1995).

### **THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR GENDER EFFECTS ON COMMUNICATION AND INFLUENCE**

Research on reactions to agentic and communal language reveals that men and boys have greater latitude in the way they communicate

than do women and girls. Displays of warmth and agreeableness enhance women's likability and influence but have relatively little effect on men's (Carli, 1989, 2006; Ridgeway, 1982; Shackelford, Wood, & Worchel, 1996). Men and boys can communicate in a fairly forceful, dominant manner or a more gentle, warm way with little effect on how they are evaluated or on their degree of influence. But women and girls are penalized for communicating in a dominant or even highly competent manner because such behavior is seen as lacking in communion or as an illegitimate attempt to take charge and assume status.

The source of these penalties lies in the stereotypes that people hold about men and women. As noted earlier, people consider men to be more agentic than women, and women to be more communal. But stereotypes about men and women go beyond the merely descriptive; they are also prescriptive. People expect women to be warm and communal and judge behavior that deviates from these expectations as violations of gender-role norms (Carli & Eagly, 1999; Eagly & Carli 2007). Thus women's highly agentic behavior violates prescriptive gender role norms but men's do not (Carli & Eagly, 1999).

Exerting influence is more challenging for women than men because descriptive stereotypes paint women as lacking competence and authority, which undermines women's ability to influence others. On the other hand, because of prescriptive stereotypes about female communion, women are perceived as lacking sufficient warmth if they behave too agentially, which likewise reduces their influence. This need to balance both demands creates a double bind. Women who communicate in a warm communal manner may be criticized and lack influence for not being agentic enough, but women who communicate with directness and authority may be criticized and lack influence for not being communal enough (Carli, 2004).

According to *social role theory* (Eagly, 1987), gender stereotypes derive from the social roles that men and women hold; people infer gender differences by observing the

behavior of men and women within the roles that each gender typically holds. As a result of the traditional division of labor, women more often hold domestic roles, such as childcare provider and homemaker, and men more often hold the role of primary financial provider. Even when women are employed, men tend to occupy higher-status occupations than do women. And men's wages are on average higher than women's. In general, the roles typically held by men call for agentic behavior, whereas the roles typically held by women call for communal behavior, thus leading people to associate agency with men and communion with women.

An alternative theoretical model for understanding gender effects in language, *expectation states theory*, focuses on the hierarchies that form among social groups (Ridgeway, 2001). These hierarchies, which may be based on a variety of social categories such as race, occupational status, and gender, result in stereotypes that link greater competence and importance to the higher-status group. In addition, higher status individuals are influential and are encouraged to behave in an assertive agentic manner, whereas low-status individuals are expected to be helpful, supportive, and to yield in influence to those of higher status. According to status theorists, women have lower status than men, and thus men receive more opportunities to display agentic behavior. But women who take charge and behave in an agentic manner are denigrated and rejected and, as a result, have their influence further eroded. Further, to overcome their disadvantage as influence agents, women must be highly communal to demonstrate their other-directedness and lack of interest in status attainment (Ridgeway & Diekeman, 1992).

Both social role and expectation states theories can account for the overall gender differences in communication and influence. Both not only posit that men communicate more agentially and women more communally, but also that women have more difficulty exerting influence and depend more than men on communal language to be effective influence

agents. According to social role theory, communal behavior is congruent with the female gender role and according to expectation states theory, communal behavior is expected of low-status individuals, such as women in interactions with men, to demonstrate collectivist or group-oriented goals. Moreover, both theoretical models link gender differences in behavior to power differences between men and women. Specifically, men possess more power than do women, particularly *legitimate power* derived from holding social roles that command authority (e.g., high-status work roles) and *expert power*, derived from the perception of greater male agency and competence (Carli, 1999). As a result, the theories predict that in mixed-gender interactions it is men rather than women who would be free to communicate agentially, and men more than women are expected to resist agentic language by women and women's influence. However, in contexts that favor women, such as those that are stereotypically feminine or in which women have more expertise, agentic language and influence by women should be greater. Both social role or expectation states theories account for men's greater agentic language and the bigger gender difference in agentic language use in mixed than same-gender interactions.

Contrary to predictions based on status theory, gender differences in communal language appear to be more pronounced in same-gender interactions. Overall, both genders are generally warmer in interactions with women and girls. A reasonable inference is that mixed-gender interactions increase gender differences in status-related behaviors, behaviors conveying relative levels of agency, because it is only in mixed gender interactions that gender conveys relative status. However, displays of verbal and nonverbal warmth, while effective at reducing resistance to female influence in mixed-gender interactions, may also have a purely affiliative meaning, particularly in interactions among women or girls. That is, both people may expect interactions with women to be more communal and therefore they may



themselves express greater warmth to women than men. This interpretation is congruent with social role theory, which posits that the particular behaviors displayed by men and women should be normative for the particular roles they are enacting. Perhaps people interacting with women may take on a more social role than people interacting with men.

## CONCLUSION

It is inappropriate to conclude that men and women communicate in vastly different ways. Gender differences in communication are typically small. Nevertheless, the differences that do exist reveal a consistent pattern: women's language is relatively communal – warmer, more supportive and pleasant – than men's, and men's language is relatively agentic – more assertive, dominant, and task-oriented – than women's.

Men are particularly agentic in interactions with women and it is men more than women who reject agentic communication in women. These findings suggest that gender differences in agentic language are mediated by men's greater perceived power and authority and gender stereotypes that associate men with agentic traits. Further support for this contention comes from research showing that power mediates gender differences in communication. Both correlational and experimental evidence indicates that both men and women communicate more agentically when they have more power, either because of their formal leadership role or their greater perceived expertise or knowledge. Moreover, female and male leaders, who are more similar in authority than women and men are generally, do not differ in their agentic language.

Gender differences in communal language operate somewhat differently. Gender differences in communal language occur independent of status and power effects, and occur even among leaders because communal behavior is a prescription of the female, but not the male, gender role. Nevertheless, communal language does vary across situations. In particular,

both men and women communicate more communally to women than to men and communal language is particularly prevalent in interactions between women. Why? Perhaps people are more communal to women because they expect women to be warmer and believe that women will find such behavior appealing. It is also possible that women's communal language facilitates pleasant and harmonious interactions and thereby elicits similar behavior from others. Alternatively, socialization in same-gender groups may produce different social norms and create different male and female group cultures that create warmer interactions among women and girls and the least amount of warm communal behavior among men and boys (Maltz & Borker, 1982). Consequently, warm or affiliative behaviors may very well serve three purposes: women may use them because it is prescriptive of the female gender role and necessary to reduce resistance to female influence attempts; both men and women may exhibit communion to be friendly and collaborative when such friendliness seems appropriate or expected (e.g., when they are interacting with a girl or woman); and men may communicate communally to elicit favorable reactions from a female – perhaps even with the goal of increasing their influence over her.

The only exception to this general finding of greater warmth in female communication is the greater bullying and indirect aggression of adolescent girls than boys. Girls' indirect aggression lacks communion, but it is also less overt than boys' and men's greater direct verbal and physical aggression. Thus, it appears that girls may use bullying and rumor-mongering as a substitute for more dominant and direct forms of abuse, perhaps because more direct forms are less compatible with female gender norms.

Whatever the reason for the gender composition effect on gender differences in communal language, it is clear that conveying communion is important to women's influence. Although men are more likely than women to reject women who show highly competent behavior, both men and women

denigrate and resist the influence of women who behave in an immodest or dominant manner. Dominance and immodesty are not communal and cannot be easily reconciled with the female gender role. Moreover, both men and women perceive women to be less agentic than men. This, combined with the demand for female communion, creates a double bind. On one hand, people judge women's abilities more harshly than men's, having doubts about women's competence and agency. On the other hand, women who communicate highly agentially and thus challenge doubts about their abilities, may be seen as insufficiently communal, and reducing women's likability and influence. Thus, women must combine agentic and communal language to overcome resistance to their influence while still adhering to traditional gender role expectations.

Men have more latitude in their communication style. People do not penalize men for language that is too agentic or too communal and men's influence does not depend as much on their likability as women's influence does. As a result, it is not surprising that women consistently show higher levels of communion than men do – warmth is expected of women, regardless of their power or status. Overall then, the patterns of communication and influence displayed by women and men are complex. But it appears that both genders exhibit behaviors that are expedient and likely to be most effective and influential, given their social roles and relative power, in their interactions with others.

Gender differences in communication are consistent with predictions based on social role theory. Accordingly, one might expect that as men's and women's roles change, with an increasing proportion of women entering paid employment (see Eagly & Carli, 2007), gender differences in agentic and communal behavior might change, as well. In fact, evidence from meta-analyses indicates that such change is taking place: Women have become increasingly agentic – more assertive and masculine – and as a result, considerably more androgynous (Twenge, 1997, 2001). Indeed, women's agentic traits have increased and decreased in the 20th century as a function of

women's career and educational opportunities: increasing from the 1930s to the Second World War, decreasing after the war, and increasing from the late 1960s onward (Twenge, 2001). Similar changes have occurred in some gender differences in language. Specifically, gender differences in affiliative and assertive speech have been shrinking over time (Leaper & Ayres, 2007).

In conclusion, gender differences in communication and influence vary as a function of the nature of the interaction, and the relative status of the interactants. In general, gender effects on agentic and communal language reflect gender stereotypes and the types of social roles that women and men hold. Women remain underrepresented in positions of authority and experience resistance to their influence. Yet there is reason to expect continued improvements in women's status. Increasing numbers of women can be found in positions of authority and leadership. And support for gender equality has risen in many countries around the world (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). If these changes continue, women may find that they are no longer constrained by the double bind, and men's and women's language should become increasingly similar.

## NOTE

- 1 Men and boys have more freedom to violate gender norms along communal–agentic dimensions. However, people do sometimes penalize men and boys more than women and girls for gender-role violations, particularly for behavior that seems effeminate (e.g., Blakemore, 2003; Madon, 1997; Martin, 1990).

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# The Social Psychology of Gender across Cultures

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## THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER ACROSS CULTURES

There are important biological differences between the sexes, but do women and men also differ in important ways in their typical style of thinking, feeling, and behaving? If so, how can we account for these psychological differences? These questions have generated considerable interest and debate in psychological sciences, and for good reasons (Deaux, 1985; Eagly, 1995; Stewart & McDermott, 2004). The study of gender has implications for all areas of psychology and all theories about human behavior.

So does the study of culture. Over the last few decades, we have witnessed a tremendous amount of work devoted to the analysis of cultural similarities and differences in psychology, often raising questions about the standing of theories elaborated and tested exclusively within Western nations (Chiu & Hong, 2006; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Guimond, 2006; Schaller & Crandall, 2004). However, researchers have rarely considered both

gender and culture together. Rather, those who study gender differences typically ignore culture, whereas those who study cultural differences typically ignore gender. Conclusions based on such approaches may be misleading to the extent that they fail to identify those points at which culture and gender interact.

In this chapter we consider the picture that emerges from the growing number of studies looking at the extent to which there are variations across cultures in gender similarities and differences. We start by considering perceived gender differences across cultures (i.e., stereotypic beliefs) before moving to research on actual similarities and differences between women and men in personality, values, emotions, and self-construals. We discuss issues of status and roles and then show how taking into account culture brings renewed understanding of the processes underlying gender similarities and differences. We outline future prospects based on our analysis and elaborate on implications for the psychological examination of both culture and gender.

## GENDER STEREOTYPES: WHEN BELIEFS BECOME REALITY

Research on group stereotypes in general, and gender stereotypes in particular, has provided an important contribution to the psychological study of gender (see Wood & Eagly, 2010; Yzerbyt & Demoulin, 2010). Stereotypes are beliefs about the characteristics of members of a particular group. One important feature of stereotypes, and one reason why they are of great theoretical interest, is their socially shared nature: people generally agree on the traits that are typical of a given group. Thus, in the case of gender stereotypes, research shows that women and men agree on the attributes that are typical of men and on those that are typical of women (Guimond, 2010). Moreover, the various traits attributed to men and to women are not perceived as independent of each other. Rather, research shows that they are structured along two main dimensions: an individualistic dimension, typical of men, usually called *agency*, with traits such as dominant, assertive and boastful, and a more social or collectivistic dimension, typical of women, usually called *communion*, with traits such as affectionate, gentle and sensitive (Wood & Eagly, 2010; see also Carli, Chapter 13 this volume).

Starting in 1972, Williams and Best (1982, 1986) conducted an elaborate cross-cultural study of gender stereotypes with university students from 30 countries. Students were presented with 300 Adjective Check List items and were asked to indicate for each of them whether it was more frequently associated with men, with women, or not differentially associated with the sexes. Although there were some variations across cultures, the results suggested that overall, gender stereotypes were pancultural – that is, shared not only across gender but also across cultures. Computing indices of favorability (evaluation), activity, and strength, Williams and Best (1986) found that the stereotype of men was higher on activity and strength than that of women. However, there were no systematic differences across cultures on the favorability

dimension. Thus, the image of men is not generally more favorable compared to the image of women. In fact, many studies show the reverse to be the case (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994). One may summarize the evidence, following Glick et al. (2004), by suggesting that women are generally perceived as wonderful but weak, whereas men are generally perceived as bad but bold. More recent studies looking at cultures varying on the dimension of power distance (see Hofstede, 1980) found similar results (see Désert & Leyens, 2006; Guimond et al., 2007).

Although agency and communion are central dimensions, gender stereotyping occurs not only on personality traits but also on physical traits, cognitive abilities, roles, and occupations (Biernat, 1991; Deaux, 1985). Examining cognitive abilities, Guimond and Roussel (2001, Study 1) asked 463 university students in France: Do you believe that women [men] in general are gifted in science [language]? Ratings were significantly different depending on the target group (men vs women) and the domain (science vs language). Men were perceived as significantly more gifted in science than women, and women were perceived as significantly more gifted in language than men.

How important are such descriptions about the content of gender stereotypes in helping us understand the psychology of gender? Whereas research explaining why people hold these stereotypes is certainly important, one should not discard knowledge about the content of gender stereotypes too quickly because we now know that the consequences of gender stereotyping depend on content.

Consider the classic experiment by Zanna and Pack (1975) on the self-fulfilling nature of apparent gender differences in behavior. The female student participants, who expected to meet a fellow male student from Princeton, described themselves as more submissive and feminine when the attractive male student held traditional stereotypic views about women than when he held liberated views. Moreover, and consistent with

the researchers' hypothesis, the female students 'acted dumber' in the former condition compared to the latter. Their performance on a problem-solving test was significantly lower when the Princeton male was chauvinistic rather than progressive. Because these results held when the partner was desirable and attractive, but not when the Princeton male was an undesirable person, they reflect the fact that these women were motivated to conform to gender stereotypes to get along with their interaction partner.

A strong body of evidence, from the ground-breaking studies of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) with school children to the laboratory research by Snyder (1984) and the now large literature on stereotype threat (e.g., Steele & Ambady, 2006, see Betz, Ramsey, & Sekaquaptewa, Chapter 26 this volume), has lent considerable support to the conception of group stereotypes as self-fulfilling. Because beliefs can create reality, knowing the content of stereotypic beliefs allows one to anticipate the type of reality that is going to be created.

This was illustrated in a series of experiments testing the impact of gender stereotypes on memory for one's grades in school (see Chatard, Guimond, & Selimbegovic, 2007). Our memory is often used to reconstruct the past in ways that suit our purposes. As Conway and Ross (1984) suggested, you can get 'what you want by revising what you had'. Thus, when asked to report as accurately as possible their grades, students will be motivated to report higher grades than those that they have actually obtained. However, as Chatard et al. (2007) argued, gender stereotypes could be an important source of bias given that their content reflects cognitive abilities. Because women are stereotypically better than men in the verbal domain, it was expected that in this domain women would be more likely than men to overestimate their grades. Similarly, because the stereotype suggests that men are better than women in mathematics, it was expected that in this area, men would be more likely than women to overestimate

their grades. Two studies found support for these predictions (Chatard et al., 2007). When gender stereotypes were contextually salient, students overestimated their grades in stereotype-consistent domains, but this gender difference in the recall of grades did not emerge when gender stereotypes were not contextually salient.

These findings have important implications for understanding and explaining gender differences in behavior. This is especially the case because gender stereotypes do not simply have descriptive components, they also have prescriptive ones. They suggest how one *should* behave (Prentice & Carranza, 2004). Thus, when men and women behave differently, a potentially important explanation is a process of conformity to gender stereotypic beliefs. This means that processes of social influence, which have little to do with biology, can be the source of many gender differences in behavior. It also means that social psychology as a field dedicated to the scientific study of social influence may have a lot to offer to this area (see Haslam et al., 1996; Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999). In fact, recent research has specified the ways in which these influence processes come into play, and we will discuss this in detail when we consider explanations for gender differences in social behavior. Before that, we need to address the question of why these gender stereotypes exist in the first place. Why is it that men are perceived as agentic and women as communal? Why not the reverse?

## ORIGINS OF GENDER STEREOTYPES: STATUS AND ROLES

The widely shared nature of gender stereotypes raises fundamental questions about the source of these beliefs that are not easy to answer. Nevertheless, considerable progress has been made by focusing on the impact of social status and social roles. Whether we like it or not, in virtually all countries around the world, one finds men in socially dominant

positions relative to women (Glick, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Accordingly, the assumption that men have higher status and greater power than women is central to many social psychological analyses of gender stereotypes: gender is commonly used in research to operationalize status, prestige, power, and influence (Wood & Eagly, 2010). Moreover, attempts to disentangle the effect of gender from the effect of social status and power suggest that stereotypic beliefs about men and women are firmly rooted in society's division of labor, and therefore in the social structure (Chatard, Guimond, Lorenzi-Cioldi, & Désert, 2005; Eagly & Steffen, 1984). In general, less prestigious roles and occupations ask for communal behavior, whereas more prestigious ones ask for agentic behavior. The fact that men and women are unevenly distributed in such roles and occupations boosts the belief that men are agentic and women are communal.

In a seminal demonstration of this central hypothesis of *social role theory*, Eagly and Wood (1982) showed that, knowing only the gender of the protagonist of an influence scenario, participants inferred higher status for men than for women. In contrast, when both genders were portrayed in an ostensibly similar occupational role, the impact of gender stereotypes was reduced (see Eagly, 1987). Likewise, Moskowitz, Suh, and Desaulniers (1994) demonstrated that employees of both sexes acted more agentially when interacting with a subordinate than when interacting with a superior. The pre-eminence of status cues in the interpretation of male and female behavior is demonstrated quite clearly in a study in which participants distributed agentic and communal traits among two managers and two employees of each sex (Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1997). Results showed that participants matched the traits according to the targets' professional role (judging both managers as more agentic than the employees), rather than their gender (men and women occupying the same professional role being matched with similar traits). Taken together, these findings support the idea that status cues override, or

account for, gender effects (notwithstanding, in all of these studies, congruent roles, that is woman–employee and man–manager, produced the strongest contrast).

Research on the *stereotype content model* (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) confirms the role of group status as a determinant of perceived competence in the stereotype of all possible groups that people can think of (see Caprariello, Cuddy, & Fiske, 2009; Fiske & Cuddy, 2006). Despite important differences between the gender status-system and other long-term status systems, notably class, ethnicity, and age (see Fiske, 2010), the study of gender differences has provided valuable insights for understanding how status hierarchies operate at a more general level (see Lorenzi-Cioldi, 2009; Ridgeway & Bourg, 2004). A case in point is oppression or subordination theories, which were initially elaborated to account for women's superior competence in the nonverbal domain (see LaFrance & Henley, 1994). The basic idea of these theories is easily generalized to other status systems: those who possess status and power are the focus of attention (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). The disadvantaged, aware that their fate depends on adaptation to those with greater power, are motivated to pay attention to those with power (Fiske, 1993). Knowledge about the powerful's attributes, preferences, and behaviors is sought in order to predict their reactions, to respond appropriately, and possibly to influence them. Consistent with these ideas, Snodgrass (1992) provided evidence of greater interpersonal sensitivity among subordinates than among leaders, a tendency that is at work in male–female relationships (see Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008).

Based on the distinction between agency and communion in gender stereotype content, some authors have argued that men pursue positive distinctiveness using agentic (i.e., status-relevant) dimensions, and women, in a parallel process, pursue positive distinctiveness using communal (status-irrelevant) dimensions (e.g., Maccoby, 1998; Oldmeadow & Fiske, 2010). From the social



identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), this difference has been portrayed as a social creativity strategy, whereby members of a low-status group achieve positive distinctiveness despite their negative standing in the social structure (e.g., Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001). Accordingly, this difference is contingent on values that by and large govern societies. Western societies value individualistic beliefs, which are akin to agentic qualities (Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007). Research on gender stereotypes has shown that descriptions of men in general match closely those of adult, white, healthy persons, whereas descriptions of women are more group-specific, that is, they are comprised of relational and communal characteristics (see Wood & Eagly, 2010; see also Hegarty, Parslow, Ansara, & Quick, Chapter 3 this volume). The shared cultural norm of the agentic person, and the ingroup norm, coincide for men, but diverge for women. Direct evidence for this comes from research on the perception of leadership styles (e.g., Eagly & Carli, 2007). For example, the 'think manager–think male' phenomenon (Schein, 1996) shows that leaders are typically endowed with masculine, agentic characteristics. Women must therefore face the conflicting demands of what it means to be a good leader and of what it means to be a woman (see Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004).

A series of studies by Lorenzi-Cioldi (2002) highlights the resulting greater ambivalence of perceptions concerning lower-status groups. Male and female Swiss participants judged the extent to which various attributes apply to people in general, to men and women, to Westerners and Asians, and to themselves. Two attributes represented the Western culture ('independent' and 'individualistic'), and two other attributes represented the Asian culture ('collectivistic' and 'follower'). The findings showed that, overall, Westerners, men, and people in general were attributed agency, whereas Asians were attributed communion. Men's self-descriptions paralleled the descriptions of their cultural and their gender

ingroups. In contrast, perceptions of female targets, as well as women's self-descriptions, embodied intermediate levels of both agentic and communal behaviors. Furthermore, these effects were accentuated when participants were first provided with a cultural prime (see Lorenzi-Cioldi & Chatard, 2006). Apparently, only those who have power and status can fully claim to embody the cultural norm of the self-contained person.

### **EXPLAINING GENDER SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES: THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE**

Turning to explanations of actual similarities and differences between men and women, rather than perceived ones, one encounters an important debate between social role theory, arguably the most influential socio-cultural explanation of gender differences, and an alternative, biologically based explanation, proposed within the evolutionary perspective (Eagly & Wood, 1999). As we hope to show, taking into account variations across cultures brings new insights into this debate.

According to evolutionary theorists, women and men should differ in domains in which they have faced different adaptive problems throughout human evolution. From this perspective, natural selection has produced gender differences over the course of human evolution, especially in traits involved in men's and women's reproductive fitness (see Byrd-Craven & Geary, Chapter 7 this volume). For example, for biological reasons, including pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, women are more invested than men in their relationship with their children. Women who were more agreeable and nurturing may have promoted the survival of their children and gained evolutionary advantage. In contrast, men's higher aggressiveness and assertiveness may have fostered their fitness in ancestral environments by increasing their chances of rising in dominance hierarchies and acquiring resources

that added to their mate value. Evolved dispositional gender differences are presumably caused at a proximate level by genetic differences between the sexes and by genetically guided biological mechanisms (e.g., hormonal factors) (see Lippa, 2005; Schmitt, 2005).

Evolutionary and social role theories make different predictions about the influence of culture on gender differences (see Guimond, 2008; Lippa, 2010). Social role theory implies that, across societies, weaker differentiation between men and women's occupational roles and status would be associated with a decrease in sex differences. As Eagly and Wood (1999, p. 421) explicitly stated: 'To the extent that the traditional sexual division between wage labor and domestic labor disappears and women and men become similarly distributed into paid occupations, men and women should converge in their psychological attributes.' Thus, according to Eagly et al. (2004), '[t]his demise of many sex differences with increasing gender equality is a prediction of social role theory' (p. 289). In contrast, based on evolutionary psychology, most researchers predict that gender differences in personality dispositions and behaviors, which are expected to manifest innate differences between men and women, should be stable, or invariant, across cultures (Costa et al., 2001; Lippa, 2008; Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). As Lippa (2008, p. 2) noted: 'To the extent that sex differences in personality show strong consistency – sometimes even universality – across cultures, the likelihood increases that biological factors contribute to these differences.'

Cross-cultural studies are therefore ideally suited to examining the relative merit of these two major theoretical perspectives. Supporting evolutionary theorizing, Buss (1989) showed that in terms of the criteria that people use in selecting mates, there are sex differences that are invariant across cultures. However, Eagly and Wood (1999) argued that a closer examination of these data indicate cross-cultural variation that supports social role theory. They showed that across the 37 cultures examined by Buss

(1989), sex differences in mate preferences are correlated with societal gender equality: as gender equality increased, sex differences decreased. Similar findings have been observed in other domains (see Wood & Eagly, 2012). For example, differences between men and women in physical aggression against their partner (Archer, 2006), and gender differences in certain sexual behaviors (Peterson & Hyde, 2010) follow the pattern predicted by social role theory when variations across cultures are considered. However, this evidence is strictly correlational. Moreover, there is an emerging body of research showing cross-cultural variations in gender differences that do not fit either with evolutionary theorizing or with social role theory (see Guimond, 2008). Indeed, contrary to the assumption of social role theory that gender differences in ways of thinking and feeling would be minimized in modern, progressive cultures (like the UK), as compared to more traditional cultures (like Ethiopia), the opposite pattern was found. As discussed below, gender differences on a number of self-related characteristics are largest in Western countries.

In an influential paper, Costa, Terracciano, and McCrae (2001) examined sex differences in five broad personality factors. Using a large data set of students and adults ( $n = 23,031$ ) from 26 nations, they showed that sex differences are relatively small overall, but quite consistent across nations: women are higher in self-reported neuroticism, agreeableness, and warmth, whereas men are higher in assertiveness and dominance, and such differences are invariant across age lines. However, there were some important variations across cultures. As the authors noted: '[The results] show an unmistakable pattern: gender differences are most marked among European and American cultures and most attenuated among African and Asian cultures' (p. 327). At the cultural level, the magnitude of sex differences was strongly correlated with Hofstede's (1980) individualism/collectivism dimension ( $r = 0.71$ ,  $n = 23$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), a dimension that is strongly related to United Nations indices of

gender equality and economic development. Thus, gender differentiation was greater in individualistic (and more egalitarian) nations than in collectivistic (and less egalitarian) nations.

This finding of greater gender differentiation in individualistic than in collectivistic nations has been documented more recently by independent researchers using data from more than 50 nations. Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, and Allik (2008) found that women report higher levels of neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness than do men across most nations. They also found that United Nations indices of gender equality and economic development, such as the Human Development Index, are the main nation-level predictors of larger sex differences in personality. This led them to conclude that 'sex differences in personality traits are larger in prosperous, healthy, and egalitarian cultures in which women have more opportunities equal with those of men' (p. 168).

Along a similar line, studies by Watkins and colleagues (Watkins et al., 1998) indicate that the magnitude of gender differences in self-construals is contingent on culture. Indeed, differences in self-construals between women and men are well documented in psychological research (see Cross & Madson, 1997). Men are more likely to espouse an independent conception of the self than are women; they perceive themselves as being autonomous, separated from others, assertive, and unique. In contrast, women perceive themselves as being communal, relational, and embedded in others (reflecting an interdependent self-construal). However, the gender differences reported by Cross and Madson (1997) in the United States do not seem to extend beyond Western countries. Watkins et al. (1998) examined independent and interdependent self-construals across 14 countries, using various measures of self-construals, but failed to find support for the expected differences in collectivistic cultures.

Cross-cultural research on emotions reveals a similar pattern of variation in gender differences. For instance, using data from

37 countries, Fischer and Manstead (2000) found larger gender differences in the expression of emotions in individualistic than in collectivistic cultures. In the former, but not in the latter, women reported expressing stereotype-consistent emotions (joy, sadness, guilt) to a greater extent than men. Gender differences in emotion recognition across cultures have analogously been reported. For instance, in a large Internet-based study ( $n = 42,638$ ), Merten (2005) found that women were better at recognizing emotions than men, and that this female superiority was moderated by culture, in line with the above results. In this study, gender differentiation across cultures was strongly and positively correlated with the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), a reliable index of gender equality obtained from the United Nations. These results mean that there was an increase of gender differences as gender equality increased.

Cross-cultural variations in gender differences have also been documented on value priorities (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). In particular, findings from 127 samples in 70 countries ( $n = 77,528$ ) revealed that men attribute consistently more importance than women do to power, the reverse being true for benevolence. Again, these differences were quite consistent across age lines, but varied according to culture. As Schwartz and Rubel (2005) contended:

The greater the social, health, and employment equality of women and men in a country, the larger the sex differences (men higher) in power values ( $r = -0.61$ ) and the larger the sex differences (women higher) in benevolence values ( $r = 0.70$ ). ... These findings contradict the idea that gender equality reduces gender differences. (p. 1023)

Finally, gender differences in attitudes toward the social hierarchies, considered by some to be a personality predisposition (see Altemeyer, 1998), were also shown to increase with gender equality in the meta-analysis of Lee, Pratto, and Johnson (2011).

In sum, recent cross-cultural research using large data sets provides a clear picture of gender

differentiation across cultures. Men and women differ more in their personality, self-construals, emotions, and value priorities in individualistic and prosperous countries, where political and economic gender equality is high, than in more collectivistic and traditional countries, where gender equality is low. It is worth noting that this consistent pattern of findings was *never anticipated* in the studies reviewed above. This may be because this pattern contradicts current theoretical models of gender differentiation.

As Costa et al. (2001) noted, this pattern of gender differentiation is surprising because neither the evolutionary model nor the social role model can predict it. Nonetheless, researchers have offered a number of post hoc interpretations. For instance, Costa et al. (2001) suggested that men and women may be especially prone to attribute masculine and feminine behaviors to roles rather than traits in traditional cultures, and that this may account for the fact that gender differences in personality traits are larger in modern than traditional societies. Schwartz and Rubel (2005) suggested that gender differences in values may be more pronounced in post-industrial societies because women in these societies are especially motivated to express distinct values, rather than the same values as men. Although plausible, to date, none of these explanations has been subjected to empirical examination, and they therefore remain purely speculative. Based on the shifting-standards model (Biernat & Thompson, 2002), Wood and Eagly (2012) recently suggested that the findings showing the reverse of what they predict probably reflect the use of unreliable subjective rating scales. They note that when objective scales are used (i.e., performance tests), the result is typically smaller gender differences with greater gender equality. There are several reasons to doubt that this is the right explanation. First, this claim is directly contradicted by the findings of Hamamura (2012) showing greater, not smaller, gender differences in standardized mathematics performance in low as opposed to high power distance societies. Second, in the studies reviewed above

(and elsewhere, see Guimond, 2008) various types of measures other than subjective rating scales have been used (open-ended questions, reliable multi-item scales, the Twenty Statements Test, etc.). Finally, and more importantly, an alternative explanation has been empirically tested and confirmed using both subjective rating scales and objective scales as advocated by Wood and Eagly (2012). Based on theories of social comparison and self-categorization, Guimond and colleagues (Guimond et al., 2007; Guimond, 2008; Guimond, Chatard, & Kang, 2010) provided a theoretical framework that can actually predict the surprising pattern of gender differences noted above, and thus can explain why gender egalitarian societies can paradoxically produce greater psychological differences between women and men.

## **SOCIAL COMPARISON AND SELF-CATEGORIZATION ACROSS CULTURES**

Existing theories, that is, the social role and evolutionary models, are not particularly compatible with the cross-cultural evidence reviewed above concerning self-related characteristics (self-construals, values, emotions, and personality traits). A new model of gender differences is thus needed to account for these findings. In the remainder of this chapter, we outline a new approach, as recently proposed by Guimond and colleagues (Guimond, Chatard, Branscombe et al., 2006; Guimond et al., 2007). This approach builds on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) to suggest that different social comparison processes across cultures produce diverse patterns of gender differences in the self. Let us briefly outline how these different frameworks relate to one another and how they might contribute to the emergence of a new model of gender similarities and differences that can complement existing ones.

Research on Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory has shown that how people define themselves is relative rather than absolute (Buunk & Gibbons, 2006; Mussweiler & Strack, 2000). That is, people evaluate themselves in comparison with others, rather than in absolute terms. These comparisons are crucial to understanding self-evaluation and should not be neglected (see Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002). However, most research on gender differences fails to take into account this essential aspect of human functioning. Usually, gender differences in personality traits (Costa et al., 2001; Lippa, 2008; Schmitt et al., 2008), values (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005), emotions (Fischer & Manstead, 2000; Merten, 2005), and self-construals (Cross & Madson, 1997), are assessed as absolute entities, without considering the standard of comparison that participants use when evaluating themselves. Yet, a change in the standard of comparison can lead to systematic changes in self-evaluation.

Festinger (1954) argued that most people compare themselves with ingroup members, because they are more similar to the self and because such comparisons are more informative. There is evidence that people often favor comparisons with the ingroup and that they choose not to compare with dissimilar others (see Guimond, 2006). Recent research suggests, however, that social comparison is often a spontaneous and automatic process and that people cannot avoid comparing themselves, even with dissimilar others (e.g., Mussweiler, Rüter, & Epstude, 2006). Moreover, in daily life, social comparisons are often imposed by some external conditions. For example, when a woman works in a male-dominated field, she does not have another alternative than to compare with men (i.e., outgroup members).

Unlike social comparison theory, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) considers that intergroup comparisons are essential in regulating human behaviors. According to this framework, social identity is the feeling that one belongs to a social group and includes all features shared with other ingroup members. It is conceptually distinct from personal identity,

which corresponds to aspects of the self that make an individual unique, different from others. Although personal and social identities coexist within the same individual, the theory predicts that they are not activated in the same contexts. Broadly speaking, intragroup comparisons render personal identity psychologically salient, whereas intergroup comparisons trigger social identity (Turner & Onorato, 1999). However, whether or not individuals engage in social comparisons with outgroup members depends on a number of interrelated factors: the legitimacy, permeability, and stability of group boundaries. If intergroup boundaries are perceived as stable, impermeable, and legitimate, people are unlikely to engage in intergroup comparisons. In contrast, if intergroup boundaries are perceived as unstable, permeable, and illegitimate, intergroup comparisons are more frequent, and have a greater impact. As we will see, these considerations lead to specific predictions concerning variations in gender differences across social and cultural contexts.

Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987; see also Garcia, Branscombe, Desmarais, & Gee, 2006; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Ryan & David, 2003; Ryan, David, & Reynolds, 2004; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994; Turner & Onorato, 1999) complements and extends social identity theory in several respects. In this perspective, people can categorize themselves as an individual (at the level of personal identity) or as a group member (at the level of social identity). Social comparison leads to an immediate change in the level of self-categorization. When the level of self-categorization shifts from personal to social identity, a process of depersonalization or self-stereotyping occurs. People no longer perceive themselves as unique individuals, but as group members. As compared to when personal identity is salient, social identity salience leads people to ascribe ingroup characteristics to the self, to conform to ingroup norms, and to engage in stereotype-consistent behaviors. In harmony with this view, Ryan and colleagues



(2004) showed that support for Gilligan's (1982) influential thesis about gender differences in moral reasoning was observed when the social context makes gender identity salient but not when another social identity (i.e., university students) is salient.

Self-stereotyping is assumed to be a relatively spontaneous and automatic process. However, in line with social identity theory, perceptions of legitimacy, permeability, and stability of intergroup boundaries might constrain the tendency to engage in such comparisons and thereby the extent to which self-stereotyping occurs.

What predictions can be made from these theories in terms of gender differences? One interesting prediction, from a psychological viewpoint, is that gender differences should be relative and context-dependent rather than stable, fixed, and immutable (see also Batalha & Reynolds, Chapter 11 this volume). In particular, gender differences should depend on social comparisons. In line with self-categorization theory, intergroup comparisons should induce a shift to gender identity and a self-stereotyping process. Men and women should evaluate themselves as being similar to their group (i.e., in line with common gender stereotypes). This would entail an accentuation of gender differences. In contrast, intragroup comparison should induce a shift to personal identity and a process of individualization. Women and men should then evaluate themselves as being dissimilar to other members of their gender group (i.e., at odds with common gender stereotypes). This would entail a minimization of gender differences.

In four experiments, Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, and Redersdorff (2006) tested these predictions on two fundamental dimensions of the self: agentic and relational (or communal) self-construals. The researchers focused on these dimensions because, as argued by Cross and Madson (1997), there is evidence that gender differences in most psychological attributes (motivation, emotion, personality, cognition) can be explained by gender differences in agentic versus relational self-construals. Participants' self-descriptions

on these dimensions were assessed in a control condition (without any comparison), in an intragroup condition (in comparison with ingroup members) or in an intergroup condition (in comparison with outgroup members). For example, in the intragroup condition, male (vs female) participants were asked to describe themselves 'in comparison with most men (vs women)'. In the intergroup condition, participants were asked to describe themselves in comparison with the opposite gender.

The results showed that in the control condition, women described themselves as more relational than men, whereas men described themselves as more agentic than women. In line with Cross and Madson's (1997) theorizing, these gender differences were pronounced, with large effect sizes. Interestingly, however, these gender differences were eliminated in the intragroup social comparison condition; there were no statistically reliable gender differences in self-construal, either on the relational dimension or on the dimension of agency. Furthermore, the results showed that, as compared to the control condition, gender differences were significantly increased when participants were asked to rate themselves in comparison with members of the other gender group (intergroup social comparison). In terms of effect size, the results of these studies consistently indicated that gender differences in the self were small (or trivial) in the intragroup condition, medium in the control condition, and large in the intergroup condition. In line with self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987), the results also showed that these gender differences in the self were mediated by a self-stereotyping process. That is, in the control and intergroup conditions, where reliable gender differences were found, participants tended to describe themselves (self-construals) as similar to their ingroup (men vs women in general).

In sum, these studies showed that gender differences in the self are consistent with common gender stereotypes (men are more agentic, whereas women are more relational), but that these differences are relative and context-dependent rather than stable, fixed,

and immutable (see also Guimond et al., 2010). Simply changing the frame of reference changes the magnitude of gender differences, and such changes largely reflect a self-stereotyping process (the tendency to conform to ingroup norms or stereotypes). These studies highlight the critical role of ingroup versus outgroup social comparisons in shaping self-definition and gender differences. When social comparisons are limited to the ingroup, gender differences are attenuated (for related research on the effects of shifting standards, see Fuegen & Biernat, Chapter 9 this volume).

What predictions can be made from these findings in terms of the cross-cultural variations in gender differences? In a nutshell, gender differences should be large in magnitude in cultures where men and women frequently engage in intergroup comparisons. In these cultures, the norms would be consistent with, and encourage, intergroup comparisons. In contrast, gender differences should be small in cultures where intergroup comparisons are more restricted. In such cultures, the cultural norms would be at odds with, and would discourage, intergroup comparisons.

To the extent that there are variations in nations around the world in the level of gender inequality, with some cultures being less egalitarian and more hierarchical than others, the five-stage model of intergroup relations (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994) concur with these expectations. This model describes a series of stages through which most intergroup relations are assumed to develop over time. In stage 1, concerning clearly stratified intergroup relations such as 'paternalistic' societies, the model predicts that 'Only individualistic or intragroup social comparisons are deemed legitimate, since the outgroup ... is seen as being so dissimilar to the in-group' (p. 143). Thus, when the gender gap is wide and stable, this model suggests that there will be few social comparisons with members of the other gender. However, Taylor and Moghaddam (1994) suggest that in later stages, when movement from one group to another begins to be perceived as possible

and, especially, when the system of inequality is perceived as illegitimate, there will be 'a shift from interpersonal to intergroup social comparisons' (p. 147). Thus, when inequalities between women and men are reduced, an important psychological implication is that between-gender social comparisons are increasingly perceived as appropriate. Interestingly, at the level of culture, Yuki (2003) has similarly argued that while intergroup social comparisons may be an important psychological process within Western individualistic cultures, as proposed by social identity theory, Eastern collectivistic cultures are based on an alternative 'intra-group relational model'. Thus, diverse theoretical perspectives all lead to the expectation that in societies with relatively strong gender inequality, such as many African or Asian collectivist countries, there will be more within-gender than between-gender social comparisons, compared to many Western individualistic countries. The implication for gender differences is that one would predict more important psychological differences between women and men in Western cultures, insofar as they stimulate between-gender social comparisons, than in Asian or African nations.

Guimond et al. (2007) conducted a cross-cultural study to examine these predictions about the role of cultural norms and the effects of social comparison processes on gender similarities and differences. Participants were adults from five countries: France, the United States, Belgium, The Netherlands, and Malaysia. According to Hofstede's data (1980), these nations strongly differ on two major cultural norms: individualism and power distance. Individualism refers to the degree to which people value autonomy, self-interest, and separation from others, rather than strong ties between family and ingroup members. Power distance refers to the extent to which inequality among persons in different positions of power is viewed as normal and legitimate. Glick (2006) has shown that this index of power distance is indeed negatively

related to the level of actual gender equality in a nation. The higher the power distance in a society, the less equality there is between women and men. Moreover, in Hofstede's (1980) classification, power distance is strongly and negatively correlated with individualism. The United States is the nation with the highest score on individualism and the lowest score on power distance. In contrast, Malaysia is among the nations with the lowest score on individualism and the highest score on power distance. France, Belgium, and the Netherlands are intermediate on these two dimensions, though as Western nations they are closer to the United States than to Malaysia.

Guimond et al. (2007) reasoned that these cultural differences might have a major bearing on the type of social comparison in which people engage. High power distance cultures are characterized by a relatively rigid social hierarchy in which it is seen as inappropriate for people in different positions of power to interact informally with each other. Consequently, social comparison between groups at different power levels would be relatively rare, with most social comparisons being restricted to an intragroup level. In line with social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), in high power distance cultures where group boundaries are perceived as stable, legitimate, and impermeable, people may find intergroup social comparisons inappropriate and irrelevant. In contrast, in highly individualistic cultures, it is seen as appropriate to interact with and to relate oneself to people in different positions. In short, intergroup social comparisons were expected to have a stronger impact in Western nations like the United States, The Netherlands, Belgium, and France than in Malaysia. Using an experimental manipulation of social comparison, Guimond et al. (2007) found strong support for this prediction. Gender differences in the relational self were variable across cultures, being stronger among participants from Western individualist countries than among Malaysian participants. Moreover, this gender by culture

interaction in self-construal was more pronounced when participants were asked to compare themselves with members of the other gender (intergroup social comparison condition) than when participants were instructed to compare themselves with members of their own gender ingroup (intragroup social comparison condition). In fact, the gender X culture interaction on self-construal was no longer significant in the intragroup comparison condition. Participants from Malaysia had the highest scores on relational self-construals, and contrary to what was found in Western nations, intergroup social comparisons did not accentuate gender differences in self-construal. These results are consistent with the idea that cultural norms (high power distance, low individualism) constrain people's tendency to engage in intergroup comparisons.

This research has demonstrated experimentally that variations in gender differences across cultures depend on the social comparison process that participants engage in. Gender differences are more pronounced when and where people engage in intergroup social comparisons. The tendency to engage in intergroup comparison is quite limited in certain cultures (high power distance and low individualistic cultures). Highly individualistic and egalitarian cultures favor intergroup comparisons, and thus tend to magnify gender differences in the self. The social comparison explanation of gender differences across cultures outlined here deserves further examination, but clearly it contributes to explaining the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of more marked gender differences in Western nations, precisely those high in individualism and egalitarianism. Although gender differences on agentic versus communal self-construals were the focus of this research, the theoretical analysis has implications for other gender differences. In fact, as explained elsewhere (see Guimond, Chatard, Martinot et al., 2006; Guimond et al., 2010), there is strong evidence supporting this claim.

## CHANGING THE SELF MATTERS

Gender differences in self-construals fluctuate in magnitude as a function of social comparisons. Is this change in self-construal, following same-sex versus opposite-sex social comparisons, a mere perceptual phenomenon having little concrete impact on subsequent behaviors? Or, is this a genuine change in self-views that carries important consequences? This is a critical issue that was addressed in two experiments (see Guimond, Chatard, Martinot et al., 2006, Study 3 and Study 4). The results of these experiments are directly relevant to the claim of Wood and Eagly (2012) that research revealing stronger gender differences in more gender-equal societies is probably misleading. Indeed, they suggest that these results are due to the use of subjective rating scales that can obscure 'actual sex differences', differences that would be revealed using objective scales (or 'common rule' measures, see Biernat & Thompson, 2002).

To examine this issue, social comparison was manipulated on the self-rating task, following a procedure similar to that of Heine et al. (2002). After rating themselves using subjective scales, all participants were asked to complete the Social Dominance Orientation scale (SDO; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This scale was presented in the same standard format for all participants. It measures a general attitude toward group-based dominance and hierarchy. It was used because sex differences on this scale, with women being less favorable than men toward group dominance and inequality, are said to be extremely robust. Clearly, this scale cannot be said to obscure actual sex differences. To the contrary, Sidanius and Pratto (1999) have argued that differences between men and women on this scale are universal and invariant (see, however, Chatard et al., 2005; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Kappen, 2003). If Wood and Eagly (2012) are right, and under certain conditions subjective self-ratings can obscure sex differences, then one may fail to observe sex differences in the self-ratings but one

should still find a sex difference on SDO. This follows from the argument that the sex differences on self-ratings are assumed to be there, even though they are not observed. On the other hand, if the results discussed above showing shifting gender differences in self-construals using subjective rating scales do have implications for the explanation of other gender differences, then one can predict that other gender differences will also be modified (for the details of our theoretical reasoning, see Guimond, Chatard, Martinot et al., 2006; Guimond et al., 2010).

Given that comparison with the opposite sex increases gender differences while comparison with same-sex ingroup members decreases them, Guimond, Chatard, Martinot et al. (2006) predicted that the consequence would be a reduction in the gender gap in SDO in the intragroup comparison condition and an increase in the gender gap in SDO in the intergroup comparison condition, relative to the control group. Study 3 and Study 4 in Guimond, Chatard, Martinot et al. (2006) revealed evidence consistent with these predictions. In Study 3 among British university students, the results showed no effect of gender on SDO in the intragroup comparison condition. In contrast, a strong gender effect was found in the intergroup comparison condition, with men having higher SDO than women. These findings were replicated in Study 4 among French college students.

In sum, this research indicates that through a simple change in target of comparison, involving the substitution of one word, men versus women, gender differences in self-construals are altered. More importantly, this change in self-construals has implications for the explanation of other gender differences. When participants are subsequently asked to complete the SDO scale presented in the same standard format, their answers reflect the prior experimental conditions to which they were randomly allocated. Gender differences in SDO were reduced in the intragroup comparison condition and magnified in the intergroup comparison condition. Clearly, the lesson to be derived from this research is

not that subjective rating scales are a methodological artifact (for additional evidence involving both subjective scales and objective or common rule measures, see Guimond, Chatard, Martinot et al., 2006, Study 4). It is that social psychological processes of social comparison and self-categorization are fundamental to an understanding of many psychological differences and similarities between women and men. This perspective also affords a theoretical understanding of the variations across cultures that can usefully complement social role theory. As noted above, the meta-analysis of Lee et al. (2011) showed that the gender gap in SDO was larger, not smaller, in more gender-equal nations.

Because social role theory is a dynamic theory that can account for change, this type of finding does not necessarily invalidate the theory. It simply suggests that gender equality may set in motion certain social-psychological processes that will result in divergence between women and men, rather than convergence. So far, research has shown both convergence and divergence. The influence of gender roles and gender identity, concepts that already form the basis of social role theory, simply needs to be expanded to allow for the prediction of divergence between women and men, not solely convergence. The findings reviewed above by many different researchers on many different psychological constructs all showing greater divergence with greater equality clearly suggest that as Lee et al. (2011) put it, 'more gender equality does not necessarily lead to gender sameness' (p. 1048).

## **ACCOUNTING FOR CHANGE WITHIN WESTERN SOCIETIES OVER TIME**

Our analysis is relevant to understanding the changes in gender relations that have occurred over the last half-century in Western societies. Since the 1950s, when women were largely confined to domestic roles, up to the present, where women, like

men, are part of the labor force, considerable changes in gender roles have occurred. Social role theory's prediction of a narrowing of gender differences over time on agentic traits received strong support in several studies (see Wood & Eagly, 2012). However, looking at gender stereotypes and the self-concept of American men and women, Lueptow, Garovich-Szabo, and Lueptow (2001) did not find, as social role theory would expect, evidence of less gender stereotyping in the 1990s than in the 1970s. The trend is even in the opposite direction. Why? We would argue that a change from within-gender social comparisons to between-gender social comparisons is one important piece of the puzzle. As Buunk and VanYperen (1989) noted in the context of intimate relationships, 'In earlier times, when husbands and wives did not consider one another as equals, they probably did not view each other as appropriate referent persons to evaluate how good a deal they were getting' (p. 158). Thus, in North America and Western Europe in the 1950s, comparisons between men and women probably did not seem appropriate. However, as the legitimacy of gender inequality was increasingly questioned, between-gender social comparisons are likely to have become more widespread. We argue that this change in social comparison processes over time is one mechanism that can help us understand why the feminist movement in the United States, as discussed by Eagly and Wood (2011), evolved from a period where men and women were considered to be the same, to a period where, with Gilligan's (1982) work as the most well-known example, men and women were increasingly recognized as being different, and equal.

## **CONCLUSION**

Most research looking at similarities and differences between women and men on important psychological attributes has been carried out in North America and Western Europe. In



this chapter, we have reviewed evidence showing that gender stereotypes are largely shared, even across cultures, but that similarities and differences between women and men in personality, values, emotions, and the self-concept vary across cultures. Moreover, this variation, indicating more pronounced gender differences in Western individualistic countries, is unexpected from the perspective of the most influential frameworks applied to sex differences, notably evolutionary psychology and social role theory. Thus, we presented an alternative perspective based on social comparison theory and self-categorization theory that can explain why more egalitarian societies paradoxically result in greater psychological differences between women and men than do less egalitarian societies.

This analysis, predicting an interaction between gender and culture, has important implications that should stimulate interesting research in the future. For example, under what conditions does gender equality lead men and women to converge in their psychological attributes and under what conditions does it lead them to diverge? What are the implications for the work of cultural psychologists engaged in contrasting Western and Eastern psychologies, often without considering possible gender differences? Markus and Kitayama (1991) have argued for a basic difference in self-construal between members of Western European cultures and those of Asian cultures. They note that the Eastern construal in terms of an interdependent self is highly similar to some of the most significant themes of the psychology of women. Yet, they do not draw the obvious implication that there may be an interaction between culture and gender when it comes to self-construal. Likewise, in his book on cognitive differences between Asians and Westerners, Nisbett (2003) presents an important contribution that nevertheless fails to consider in any detailed manner the role of gender. This chapter clearly suggests that theories about human behavior, including research on culture and cognition, are likely to be much improved by taking into account gender and

associated processes of intragroup and intergroup social comparisons that shape self-definition and ultimately behavior.

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# Crossing Borders: Intersectional Excursions into Gender and Immigration

Kay Deaux and Ronni Michelle Greenwood

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary surge and global reach of immigration foster a generalized discourse in which the particulars of country, ethnicity, motivation, and outcome are often ignored and a generic concept of ‘immigrant’ holds sway. Most importantly for our agenda, the specificity of gender is frequently lost, either because all immigrants are subsumed in a general category without gender markers or because the male immigrant becomes prototypic. In contrast, we focus directly on gender, as it defines specific forms of immigrant experience and as it intersects with other categories such as religion, ethnicity, and class.

As psychologists, we are most interested in the hows and whys of immigration experience: motivations that drive people to immigrate, ways in which they cope with situations they encounter, and choices made to engage with, resist, or attempt to modify their circumstances. Also important, however, are the structural factors that shape immigrant populations, acting as aqueducts that favor the flow

of some immigrants and restrict the movement of others. Gender is intrinsic to many of these processes; thus, we begin with a consideration of demographic patterns that describe the gendered population of our concern.

## THE GENDERED DEMOGRAPHY OF IMMIGRATION

Demographic analyses of immigration flow reveal gender ratios that shift over time and between countries – both countries of origin and of destination. In the United States, for example, tracking over the past 150 years shows a gradual increase in the proportion of women relative to men, with earlier rates showing higher proportions of men (averaging around 55% in the last half of the 19th century) and reaching parity in the latter half of the 20th century (Donato et al., 2011).<sup>1</sup> Worldwide immigration data show a similar trend, with women constituting 45% of immigrants in 1960 and 50% in 2005 (United Nations, 2006, reported in Donato et al.,



2011). Within these general trends there are significant national differences. In Spain, for example, the percentage of immigrant women decreased from 53% (1981) to 49% (2001), while in France the proportion rose from 43% to 48% between 1962 and 1999. In Asia, considered as a whole, the percentage of women among the foreign-born population increased from 42% to 52% between 1960 and 2000 (Donato et al., 2011).

Not only does the percentage of female immigrants differ between countries, but within countries there are also variations related to country of origin. In the United States, for example, the percentage of immigrant women is 51% if immigrants from Mexico are excluded from the calculation, but only 49% if they are included, reflecting the more frequent migration of men than women from Mexico. Similar variation can be seen in many other destination countries. Gender ratios of immigrants to Malaysia, for example, are at parity if one looks at immigrants from the Philippines but are severely skewed (less than 5% women) among immigrants from Bangladesh. Less dramatic, but still illustrative, are figures from Spain, where the percentage of female immigrants from Morocco is less than 40% while the proportion of women is above 50% among immigrants from Ecuador or France (Donato et al., 2011).

Far from random fluctuations, these patterns reflect cultural norms, historical circumstances, and government policies, in all of which gender can play a key role. Examples throughout history are easy to find. Military occupation, for instance, often results in male soldiers bringing back foreign-born wives who add to the immigrant ranks (Donato, 1992). In recent decades, women have constituted a substantial proportion of migrants to the United States from the Philippines as a consequence of programs within the Philippines developed to prepare women for careers in nursing and to sponsor their migration to the United States (Espiritu, 2003; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). Similar trends have been observed in Malaysia, where Filipina migrants are targeted specifically for gendered domestic work.

In contrast, the Bracero program, enacted in the United States during the Second World War as a response to labor shortages in agriculture, almost exclusively targeted male workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). Thus, the policies of immigration and the psychology of immigrants are never far apart, with gender acting as a critical filter at all stages of the process. To quote Donato and her colleagues (2011, p. 517), 'migrants experience distinctively gendered relations that create opportunities and obstacles both in departing one society and in entering another'.

## A PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER AND IMMIGRATION

It is these gendered opportunities and obstacles that we address in this chapter. Although gender is the primary lens of our immigration analysis, other social positions also demand our attention. Just as the historical and political context of countries establishes particular conditions for the inflow and outflow of immigrant waves, so too do defining features such as religion, social class, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, family composition, and generation shape the immigrant experience. As a consequence, making broad generalization across groups is a potentially hazardous venture. Thus, while gender will serve as our central organizing category, we will also argue that an intersectional approach is necessary for a full understanding of the psychology of immigration and gender.

As our brief review of demographic trends suggests, the study of immigration calls for consideration of various levels of analysis (Deaux, 2006). The thoughts and actions of individual immigrants are influenced both by the attitudes of, and interactions with, others. Further, these social psychological processes are set within the broader social system, where policies and practices shape the opportunities and barriers of everyday experience. In our coverage, we attempt to maintain a balance between the general and the specific,

seeking on the one hand to offer principles that can be viable in characterizing the experience of immigrants across multiple settings, while on the other hand recognizing the particularities of context. From a social psychological perspective, this means understanding that a general concept may be defined or instantiated in different ways and that the concepts we believe are generally relevant and theoretically important might carry more or less weight in any particular setting.

We frame our analysis in terms of three basic questions (Deaux, 2006): (1) What does the immigrant bring to the new country? (2) What does the immigrant encounter? and (3) How does the immigrant negotiate with and accommodate to the new situation? Within each of these broad domains, numerous influential factors can be examined, and intersectional issues shape the patterns in most instances. We hope that by defining the territory and providing illustrative examples, key issues will be highlighted and paths for future work will be laid out.

## WHAT DOES THE IMMIGRANT BRING?

Immigrants come to a country with baggage. In a literal sense, the transported luggage can be minimal, as is often the case for refugees or for people entering a country without legal documentation. Metaphorically, however, baggage can refer to much more, including a set of experiences, dispositions, beliefs, and aspirations, which all possess regardless of their material circumstances. It is primarily this more psychological form of baggage with which we are concerned here.

Within the broad immigration literature, immigrants are often described in terms of the human capital and social capital that they bring. A concept that has its origin in economics (Becker, 1964), *human capital* typically refers to attributes (e.g., skills, education, experience) that a person brings to the labor market. These attributes not only vary between migrants from different countries, but gender differences often

emerge as well. For example, workers seeking jobs in agriculture (whether through government-sponsored guest worker programs or in more unregulated ways) typically have relatively little education. In contrast, nurses trained in the Philippines come with a stronger set of job-specific skills. In countries such as Canada, whose criteria for entry place greater weight on employment skills than on family reunification, the typical immigrant may arrive with considerable high-level job experience – although as Tang and her colleagues showed, Chinese women who enjoyed high socioeconomic status in their home country did not always find suitable positions in Canada (Tang, Oatley, & Toner, 2005).

Consistent with an intersectional perspective, gender sometimes interacts with other factors to influence human capital. Among poorer populations, for example, limited funds available for education are often disproportionately channeled to the boys in a family, leading to lower levels of education for girls. Demographic analyses of Asian immigrants to Canada and the United States, focusing on the relationship between the immigrant's age at time of arrival and their subsequent socioeconomic success, provide one example (Lee & Edmonston, 2011). In general, later age of arrival is associated with a lower likelihood of completing college. However, this pattern is significantly more pronounced for women than for men. Yet in apparent contradiction, several studies have shown that immigrant girls do better in school and are more likely to go to college than boys (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Terriquez, 2012).

*Social capital* refers to the interpersonal connections that a person has and the ways in which those links provide support and foster cooperation (Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Social capital can also include an immigrant's social networks, both in the country of origin and in the new country, as well as the transnational links that join the two sites. A recent demographic analysis of immigrant women in Toronto and Montreal by Gildengil and Stolle (2009) revealed considerable variation in the degree to which women were embedded in a

co-ethnic network. Consistent with the practice of many immigrants to migrate to locations where other family members are already settled, 29% of the women had 10 or more relatives living in the same city, not counting their own household. At the same time, a roughly equivalent proportion of the women had no relatives in their new city. Approximately a quarter of the women reported talking regularly to 20 or more people from their home country, while 10% said they did not talk regularly with any fellow immigrants.

These social networks are critical to the experiences of immigrants as they adapt to their new country. For both men and women, networks can be the best route to employment, as people often find their first jobs within ethnic enclaves. Even second-generation immigrants are most likely to get their first job through connections with family, friends, and other co-ethnics (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway, 2008). For women in particular, social networks often provide needed help in the care of their own children, allowing women to become wage-earners as well as mothers.

The family (both primary and extended) is a critical site for considering the relevance of gender to the immigration experience. More than an issue of human or social capital, the family is a key arena for the expression of norms, practices, and beliefs that immigrants bring from their country of origin to their new environment. Many of these factors are implicit in the lives of people when they are living in their country of origin – in the much-used phrase, it is the air that they breathe. In other cases, explicit consideration and rejection of the status quo may be the impetus for emigration – choosing to go to a country where individual effort is rewarded over class privilege, where religious and political freedom are believed to be more realizable, or where gender roles are seen to be more flexible. Critical in this analysis is the possible discrepancy between explicit expectations and implicit habits. An immigrant might choose to move for economic gains, for example, while giving little thought to the possible alteration in gender roles that

differential opportunity or shifting power bases might precipitate. A woman might migrate to another country to marry a citizen, with the promise of her own citizenship as part of the agreement, and later find that neither the marriage nor the opportunities are what she envisioned.

One must consider the total set of attributes that immigrants bring with them to the new country, such as those based on class, ethnicity, status, and religious practice. Not only do these characteristics help to define the person, but they also flesh out the substance of intersectionality as a critical frame. Equally important are issues related to social norms and gendered roles. For many immigrants, especially those who move from less developed, more traditional societies to more highly developed Western societies, residence in the new country confronts the immigrant family with new assumptions about the roles that men and women can and should play. Further, the contrast between old and new can be quite different for women and men: for women, the enlarged range of possibilities is typically experienced as positive; for men, the decreased distinction between male and female roles and the resulting shift in the balance of power within the family is often viewed as threatening and unpleasant (Deaux & Bikmen, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Pessar, 1999).

In many ways, the satisfaction or disappointment of immigration is a matter of fit between past experience, expectations, and new realities. Are expectations realized or thwarted? Is the immigrant accepted as a ‘typical citizen’ of the host country or is he or she rejected as a deviant from explicit or implicit standards? These are the kinds of questions that we address in the next section.

## WHAT DOES THE IMMIGRANT ENCOUNTER?

The diversity of experiences that immigrants confront in receiving countries is vast, ranging from the warm welcomes received by skilled white North American immigrants in Ireland

to overt discrimination and punitive social policies experienced by Latino/as in the United States and by Muslims in some Western European nations. Across differences in religion, nationality, ethnicity, and cultural tradition, immigrants share the experience of encounters with stereotypic images of their groups as they negotiate the terrain of their countries of destination. At the same time, many immigrants do realize the opportunities that they anticipated and experience the improved lives they had hoped for.

Despite common representations of the 'generic immigrant', we suggest that immigrant experiences are far from homogenous. Invisible privileges are typically associated with membership in dominant social groups (which in North American and Western European countries typically means being male, white, middle-class (or higher), heterosexual, able-bodied, and young). Key attributes such as education, skills and social class also shape an immigrant's experiences in ways that can differ for men and women, again depending on the gendered social representations and norms of the host country. Immigrants who closely 'fit' the social representations of men and women in the host culture are likely to find a smoother road to integration than those whose traditions, norms, and occupations mark them as different or 'Other'.

Generally, research shows that immigrants who appear more 'foreign,' defined by dimensions such as complexion, facial appearance, and language usage, are regarded more negatively than groups who seem more similar to the host population (Mullen, 2001). For example, in the early part of the 20th century in the United States, a shift in the predominant origin of immigrants from Anglo and Northern European countries to southern and eastern European countries led to restrictive legislation that drastically reduced immigrant flow (policies that previously had been applied only to the equally 'foreign' Chinese immigrant population). In both cases, the new population did not easily fit the established template that favored Anglo stock.

Religion can be another major source of matching, determining the attitudes of the receiving society to the newcomers. This demographic has a high profile in contemporary European immigration, where debates often focus on the degree to which Muslims can be incorporated into societies that regard themselves as purely secular. In contrast, these debates have a lower profile and less vitriol in countries such as the United States and Canada, where acceptance of multiple forms of religious expression is more in keeping with the national agenda and tradition (Foner & Alba, 2008).

Gender in and of itself would not seem to be a factor in this demographic matching process, in so far as an approximate 50/50 split between male and female immigrants would generally match the resident population. However, it is here that the intersection of gender with other characteristics becomes relevant. In many European countries, for example, the debate about Muslim incorporation finds its focus in Muslim women. It is not just Islam that is a source of contention, but rather it is the Muslim *women* wearing headscarves and burqas who are the most vivid image of the negative attitudes. These images are far more discrepant from the Western European norm than is the more casual dress code adopted by Muslim men. Muslim men, however, because they have come to be associated with terrorism, elicit images that are discrepant from the notion of a lawful and predictable society.

The conditions that immigrants encounter derive from both the properties and processes of the social system and from more immediate interactions with members of the receiving society. These circumstances, when combined with the inevitable considerations that migration to a new country entails, require identity work by the individual immigrant. Immigrants inevitably must deal with issues about their values, their priorities, and their sense of self, all of which may need to be reconstructed given their new circumstances (Deaux, 2006). We consider the role that gender plays from each of these perspectives.

## ***Multiculturalism, Social Policies, and Legislation***

At a broad social level, the lives of immigrants are affected by cultural ideologies, social representations, national policies, and laws that regulate immigration and protect or constrain immigrant rights (Deaux, 2006). Whether concrete (e.g., laws and policies) or more abstract (e.g., culturally shared beliefs and representations), these large-scale factors shape the experience of immigrants in significant ways. Latino/a immigrants to the United States, for example, confront beliefs that they all lack legal documentation and that they will never learn English (both inconsistent with the data). Similarly, Muslim immigrants to Western European countries are often seen as a threat to the secular state (Foner & Alba, 2008).

The extent to which a receiving country has adopted multiculturalism as an ideology or as a framework for policies is one of the macro level forces that shape the immigrant experience (Deaux & Verkuyten, 2013). Canada, for example, has explicitly adopted a multicultural approach to immigration and social policy that entails multicultural recognition and understanding of, and appreciation for, cultural diversity. In contrast, the United States has no official policy, but operates with a more implicit 'melting pot' ideology, in which immigrants are expected to assimilate to American norms and beliefs. Yet, even when multiculturalism is explicitly adopted, challenges to incorporation persist, arising from imperfect policy implementations and reflecting social psychological processes characteristic of intergroup relations (e.g., Hamdani, 2005; Persad & Lukas, 2002). Thus, host countries' ideologies about diversity, whether explicit or implicit, serve as both backdrop to and engine for immigration policies and their enforcement.

Specific policies regarding the entrance of immigrants into a country and the treatment of immigrants who reside there also exemplify the societal factors that affect the lives of women and men, both positively and negatively. Immigration policies differ between

the United States and Canada, for example, with the former weighted more heavily toward family reunification and the latter more heavily skills-based. These differences in policy are likely to yield different immigrant profiles, varying on characteristics such as gender, age, and socioeconomic standing. Identity intersections, for example of gender with nationality and religion, can influence policy and practice in receiving countries around the world. We offer two examples that demonstrate how macro-level factors shape the gendered experiences of immigrants: first, current practices of enforcing immigration laws in the United States; and second, restrictions on Muslim dress codes in France, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

### ***Immigration Law Enforcement in the United States***

Hispanic immigrants in the United States confront restrictive and punitive immigration policies and practices that have detainment and deportation consequences, especially for those who are undocumented (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Although undocumented immigrants to the United States come from many countries, more than two thirds of the estimated total arrives from Mexico and other Latin American countries (Passel, Capps, & Fix, 2009). Federal deportation practices under the current US administration have increased the number of people who are arrested and either detained or forcibly removed from the country. In the process, families are split up, often in gender-related ways.

In the absence of clear federal policies, individual US states are enacting their own laws, making the situation more chaotic, unpredictable, and generally more harsh for immigrants. Immigration laws are especially severe for undocumented Hispanic immigrants for whom state laws are quickly eroding federal protections, such as the recently upheld legislation in Alabama that requires schools to determine incoming students' immigration status, nullifies any contracts entered into by an illegal immigrant, and forbids transactions between illegal immigrants and the state (Robertson, 2011).



Latino/a immigrants encounter significant challenges in the workplace, including wage theft and discrimination (SPLC, 2009). Undocumented workers are in an especially difficult position because they are often unprotected by anti-discrimination legislation. Immigrant women often experience the additional problems of sexual harassment and violence, especially when they are undocumented. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, 77% of Latinas who reside in the southern region of the United States report that sexual harassment is a major problem on the job (SPLC, 2009). These problems are compounded by the failure of the justice system to protect undocumented Latinas in ways that are uniquely shaped by the intersection of their ethnicity, gender, and undocumented status (SPLC, 2009).

Anti-discrimination laws protect immigrants in theory, but in practice these protections are not always enforced. The Southern Poverty Law Center (2009) reported instances in which courts ruled that undocumented immigrants are not entitled to the protections of the Civil Rights Act. Moreover, according to their report, immigrant women confront a range of barriers to justice when they bring charges of workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, or domestic violence. Furthermore, when undocumented immigrant women do file charges against their abusers, they run the risk of being reported to immigration enforcement and then subsequently deported.

At the same time, other macro-level policies and practices can have positive effects for women. As one Salvadoran immigrant to the United States described her new circumstances, 'the laws are better here. Men have to provide child support, domestic abuse laws are stronger, and there are more organizations to help victims of domestic violence. Women have more legal rights' (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012, p. 10).

### *Restrictions on Muslim Dress Codes*

A second example of the influence of social policy and practice highlights the intersection of gender and religion. Muslim immigrants,

especially women, confront social policies and legislation that not only restrict freedom of religious expression, but also foster workplace and educational climates that expose women to harassment and discrimination. Female Muslim immigrants to France, Canada, and the United Kingdom confront laws that ban headscarves and other forms of covering, thereby denying freedom of religious expression to girls and young women, for whom dress codes and modesty are often strictly prescribed (in contrast to men, for whom consistent dress codes are encouraged rather than mandated; Zine, 2006).

Perhaps the most widely known case is the controversial French law that prohibits Muslim girls from wearing the headscarf to school. This controversy, called *l'affaire du voile* (the veil affair), was sparked in 1989 when three female students were suspended because they refused to remove their headscarves. The controversy is far from resolved; indeed, French restrictions on Muslim dress codes became more entrenched in 2011 when a ban on wearing the *niqab* (a scarf that covers the nose and mouth) in public was enacted. Women who defy the ban can be detained and fined (BBC News Europe, 2011). In the United Kingdom, no laws have yet been enacted to ban Islamic dress codes. However, specific incidents have been widely publicized, such as the occasion when the former British Home Secretary Jack Straw insisted that Muslim women who visited his office remove their veils. In another case, a woman was fired from her teaching assistant job when she refused to remove her *niqab* in the classroom (Taylor & Dodd, 2006).

At the same time, the granting of citizenship may bring opportunities and privileges that were not available in the country of origin. In the United States, for example, the majority of Muslim immigrants are citizens (Sirin & Fine, 2008) and they often have more legal rights than they did in their countries of origin. Women may also find more resources available for dealing with difficulties they have both at home and at work. For example, many women who have migrated from South Asia to

the United States experience domestic violence in their homes as the stress of changing circumstances and roles intensifies spousal conflict. In recent years, numerous ethnically sensitive shelters have been established to provide services specifically for immigrant women, offering legal assistance, social support, and counseling (Abraham, 1995, 2006).

These societal factors set the stage for the experiences that immigrants are likely to have, creating both barriers and opportunities that are differentially distributed according to gender and shaped by class, religion, and ethnicity. The extent to which the host culture is characterized by a multicultural ideology will affect the degree to which immigrants are confronted with negative stereotypes, rejection, and pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture (Deaux & Verkuynen, 2013). We now shift our level of analysis to these interactions, as immigrants engage both with members of the host society and with members of their own ethnic ingroup.

### ***Interactions with Members of Outgroups and Ingroups***

The day-to-day experiences of immigrants can be conceptualized as taking place in two general domains: first, interactions with the outgroup, where the immigrant confronts and is assessed by members of the host culture; and second, interactions with the ingroup, where interactions with family, friends, and the co-ethnic community are negotiated in a new cultural and political context.

In Western cultures, immigrants are measured against white, Eurocentric, and secular norms, and experience pressure to conform to these norms (Henry & Tator, 2005; Zine, 2006), which affords white Anglo immigrants a wide range of invisible privileges (McIntosh, 1990). In contrast, immigrants whose identity intersections mark them as different do not automatically gain these privileges, especially when those differences are represented as threatening the dominant culture. Islamic dress codes, for example, fundamentally challenge Western norms about women's autonomy and

agency, and Muslim women and girls experience a great deal of pressure to conform to Western gender norms (Zine, 2001).

At a group level, virtually all immigrants are subject to some form of stereotyping. Stereotypes are not simply homogenous representations of social categories; they also emerge from the intersections of multiple social identities (e.g., Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Greenwood, 2012; Remedios, Chasteen, Rule, & Plaks, 2011). As an example, the gender stereotypes that white North American women encounter when they immigrate to Europe are generally consistent with those of European women; in contrast, Muslim women are likely to confront stereotypes of themselves and their group as backward, oppressed, and uneducated (Zine, 2006).

Some group stereotypes of Muslims operate in gender-equivalent ways. Zine (2001), for example, described how both male and female high school students report being tracked into non-academic streams and having to fight against placement in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms because of their accents, even when they are fluent in English, and to fight for placement in the mathematics and science classes necessary for admission to university. For Muslim girls, however, these experiences are compounded by the beliefs of teachers, counsellors, and administrators that Muslim communities and families do not value education for their daughters. The stereotypes that young Muslim women confront can be particularly challenging for those who choose to wear the headscarf to school, where their greater visibility and deviance from the norm has been found to result in higher levels of discrimination (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Zine (2001) quoted one young woman who reported her teachers saying things such as 'Oh, do you have some kind of head injury?' or 'Are you bald' or 'Do you have some kind of disease?' (p. 412).

For immigrant Muslim women, the experience of 'gendered Islamophobia', a specific form of ethno-religious and racialized discrimination leveled at Muslim women (Zine, 2006, p. 240), is commonplace. Recent experimental

research confirms findings from Zine's qualitative studies showing that Muslim women are seen as less attractive and less intelligent when they adopt the *hijab* (Mahmud & Swami, 2010). These findings are also consistent with a growing body of research on discrimination in the workplace against Muslim women who wear the *hijab* (Goyette & Xie, 1999; Hamdani, 2005; King & Ahmad, 2010; Persad & Lukas, 2002). Research into Muslim experiences in Toronto indicates that discrimination in hiring, negative public perceptions, and hate crimes, are all higher for Muslim women compared to other ethnic groups, and that women who wear the *hijab* are more vulnerable than Muslim men (Hamdani, 2005). An examination of the manufacturing, sales, and service sectors indicated that Muslim women who wear the *hijab* experienced substantially more rejections and negative interactions when applying for work than did Muslim women who do not (Pershad & Lukas, 2002). This finding is complemented by experimental field research demonstrating that Muslim women who wear the *hijab* during a job interview have shorter interactions with the interviewer and are rated more negatively, especially when they do not provide stereotype-disconfirming information (King & Ahmad, 2010).

Gender stereotypes can also shape the employment opportunities that are available to immigrant women and men. For example, white employers may prefer Latina women as domestics due to stereotypes of 'docility' and the expectation that they will do housecleaning as well as look after children (Browne & Misra, 2003; de la Luz Ibarra, 2000; Romero, 1992; Wrigley, 1995). In contrast, other research has shown white employers reluctant to hire Filipina domestic workers because of their higher levels of education and English fluency – factors that are thought to contribute to autonomy and independence (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001).

Employment is clearly an arena in which structural and interpersonal factors are intertwined. Societal policies and economic conditions may provide opportunities for both women and men that were not available in the country of origin. At the same

time, actual practices in both hiring and treatment can be shaped by restrictive stereotypes and discriminatory behaviors that relegate women and men to particular employment niches – often ones that pay less and offer fewer worker protections.

The structures and practices of the host country inevitably have consequences for the ways in which immigrants interact with members of their own ethnic group, and particularly with their immediate family. At times, these two sources can have opposing effects. Employment opportunities that allow women to contribute substantially to the family income (Pedraza-Baily, 1991; Pessar, 1999), for example, may also challenge traditional notions of balance of power within the family (Deaux & Bikmen, 2010). Illustrative of a change in status is this statement by a Vietnamese immigrant to the United States:

In Vietnam the man of the house is the king. Below him the children, then the pets of the home, and then the women. Here, the woman is the king and the man holds a position below pets. (Kibria, 1990, p. 108, quoted in Pessar, 1999)

Even when subjective assessments are less dramatic, shifts in responsibility and division of labor inevitably occur. The majority of immigrant women are in the labor force (Foner, 2000) and research generally shows that immigrant women gain more economically as a result of migration than do men (Pessar, 1999). As a consequence of their greater financial contributions to household income, women often seek a more equal role in other family decisions. These changes are particularly marked among women whose socioeconomic position in the country of origin was relatively low and where the difference between past and present is substantial (Deaux & Bikmen, 2010). For men, in contrast, the new conditions may constitute a loss in relative prestige and power, leading to more negative affect and greater dissatisfaction with the new country (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Pessar, 1999). In some cases men continue to have the stronger power position in a relationship, as when the

woman is dependent on her husband for her legal status. Abraham (2006) has discussed the situation of many women who have migrated from South Asia to the United States in terms of these pressures, particularly as it relates to marital violence. Physical and sexual abuse in the marital relationship can occur, either as a perpetuation of norms held in the country of origin or as a reaction by men to frustrations experienced in the new country. For the woman whose legal status depends on her husband, choices may be limited by financial constraints or by a reluctance to go outside the family network to avail herself of social services. For the children of immigrant parents, both expectation and experience are often shaped by gender, frequently interacting with ethnic group. Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, and Holdaway (2008) found that concerns with gender relations were most prominent among Latino/a and Chinese young people. The Chinese women believed that their parents' traditional values considered women less important than men, and viewed a good marriage with submission to the future husband as the major goal for a young Chinese woman. Educational and occupational aspirations, in contrast, were promoted only for sons. Among the Latino/as in their study, sexual relations were a major concern, primarily expressed in greater restrictions on the actions of young women. Stronger adherence to traditional socialization practices for daughters than for sons has been observed in families across a broad range of ethnicities (Dion & Dion, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Qin, 2006). Yet despite these parental socialization pressures, immigrant women frequently find that they have greater freedom in the new country than they had before.

### ***Individual Processes of Identity Negotiation***

From a psychological perspective, immigration experiences need to be assessed at the individual level, understanding what impact societal factors and social interactions have

on the lives of immigrants themselves. For our analysis, we focus on identity negotiation, a set of processes that illustrate the dynamic link between individuals and their social environment and that also provide evidence for the importance of an intersectional approach to gender and immigration.

Immigrants live between at least two cultural groups and cultural traditions: those of the host country and those of the country of origin (Wiley & Deaux, 2010). Aware of both reference points, immigrants must decide how (and whether) to maintain or transform their identities of origin in tandem with developing new identities anchored in the culture and traditions of the receiving country. In their model of bicultural identity performance, Wiley and Deaux (2010) analyze how characteristics of the individual, features of a particular audience, and the visibility of one's ethnic or immigrant group to the audience interact and shape the ways in which bicultural individuals perform their multiple identities. Important characteristics of the immigrant include self-categorization, importance, meaning, and embeddedness of the identity (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004); audience features include their willingness to accept, question, or recognize the bicultural individual's identity, as well as the relative status difference between host and immigrant group. Target group visibility is a factor that is believed to moderate the interactions between the two groups.

Identity threats, such as calling into question the legitimacy of the bicultural person's category membership, can occur in interaction with both ingroup and outgroup audiences. A Latino/a immigrant can perceive, for example, that he or she is both 'too Latino' for Americans and 'too American' for Latino/as (Wiley, 2012). Visibility to a selected audience plays a role as well, setting up parameters that define expectations and in some cases constrain the options available to the individual immigrant. Both ethnicity and gender, as visible identity markers, are relevant to these processes.

To show more clearly how these processes work, and at the same time illustrate the

importance of an intersectional analysis, we offer two examples: the first considers the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion, as exemplified by Muslim women; the second examines the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation in *mestizas*<sup>2</sup> (Anzaldúa, 1999).

Consider first the case of Muslim women immigrants who, as we have noted, encounter different reactions depending on their choice of covering. The choice to wear the *hijab* in Western cultures, although undoubtedly multi-determined, illustrates the three components of bicultural identity performance specified by Wiley and Deaux (2010). Importance of religious identity certainly influences the choice to wear the headscarf, but the meaning of this choice and its consequences for identity maintenance are shaped by features of both the ingroup and outgroup audiences. Interviews with Muslim women in Scotland demonstrated the interactive nature of bicultural identity performance, in that the subjective experience of Muslim identity results, in part, from its validation by others (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013).

When other Muslims are the audience, the headscarf signals group membership and shared values and serves to validate one's identity as a Muslim. Wearing the headscarf affords women positive recognition by other Muslims, which in turn evokes feelings of pride and a sense of oneness with Islamic teaching. Additionally, wearing the *hijab* facilitates identity-related behaviors. By wearing the *hijab*, Muslim women maintain conscious awareness of religious injunctions to avoid settings and behaviors that are inconsistent with Islamic teaching. The *hijab* is a constant reminder of Muslim identity that serves as an important anchor for identity maintenance in contexts of pressure to conform to Western gender norms (Zine, 2001, 2006).

Wearing the headscarf also signals identity to outgroup audiences, which, in addition to the negative consequences discussed earlier, can also have some positive outcomes for Muslim women living in Western societies (Hopkins & Greenwood, 2013). Miscategorization as 'Pakistani' or 'Arab' is a common experience

for some Muslims, for example, but by adopting the *hijab*, Muslim women can to some degree control outgroup members' understanding of who they are, as well as who they are not. Wearing the *hijab* creates opportunities for Muslim women to be 'ambassadors for Islam'. Attending to Muslim 'etiquette', wearing the *hijab* creates opportunities to educate others about Islam and to make a good impression on non-Muslims, a role that women appear more likely to take on than men (Sirin & Fine, 2008). Through religious identity performance in the context of positive interactions with non-Muslims, Muslim women can fulfill *jihad*, the duty to strive in the way of God.

A second example of identity performance as shaped by the intersection of multiple positions is work on lesbian Latinas in the United States (Acosta, 2008; Anzaldúa, 1999). Building on Anzaldúa's concept of *mestiza* consciousness, Acosta (2008) examined the experiences of *lesbianas* (lesbian *mestizas*) in those borderland spaces where they negotiate, perform, or silence their identities, depending on their audience and perceived identity threats. For *lesbianas*, both immigration status and racism shape the ways in which they experience and perform their sexual identities.

In terms of the Wiley and Deaux (2010) model of bicultural identity performance, the ingroup Latino/a audience for *lesbianas* is often unwilling to accept the lesbian aspects of the women's identities. Because it is possible to conceal this identity, *lesbianas* can choose to perform a 'straight' identity when interacting with ingroup members (e.g., family), but at a cost. A price is paid in strained relationships with partners and anxieties associated with fears of being outed, as well as negative self-views associated with lying to important family members and friends (Acosta, 2008).

In their new country, *lesbianas* are confronted with a system of racial hierarchies and social categorization that defines them as a member of an ethnic (Hispanic) minority. Social categorization as an ethnic minority shapes the ways in which *lesbianas* experience their sexualities within US culture, including LGBT communities, where 'you



are not like the others, when you have an accent, when you are not white enough' (Acosta, 2008, p. 653). As a consequence, *lesbianas* in Acosta's study sometimes preferred to engage with specifically Latino/a LGBT groups, which, although stratified by age, nationality, and language abilities, afford members more accepting spaces for performing an integrated bicultural identity.

Both of these examples illustrate the complex interplay of gender and immigrant status with other social categories. Although our two examples focus on women's experiences, self-presentation and intersecting identities are issues for male immigrants as well. Waters, for example, in her work with AfroCaribbean immigrants to the United States, suggested that adopting a bicultural identity may be easier for women than for men because men are more 'violently stigmatized' (1999, p. 322) in their interactions with the larger society.

To summarize, immigrants confront a host of policies and laws that can both restrict and expand their opportunities. These policies are often deeply gendered and have qualitatively different consequences for women and men. Similarly, the interpersonal interactions that male and female immigrants have, while perhaps sharing many features because of common ethnic or religious underpinning, nonetheless also reveal differences associated with gender. Differences in experience in turn influence the ways in which men and women adapt to the new environment, developing identities that fit both their aspirations and their realities.

## WHAT DOES THE IMMIGRANT DO?

As strangers in a strange land, immigrants need to find ways to deal with the situations they encounter, whether expected or unexpected, favorable or unfavorable. The choices that immigrants make shape the course of their own life experiences, as well as those of their immediate family. Moreover, these individual choices, when aggregated, are likely to affect the character of the communities in which they live as well.

Immigrants' decisions are influenced not only by the attributes they bring and the circumstances they face, but also by the degree to which new situations map onto past experiences. In many cases, the discrepancy between past and present is viewed far more favorably by women than men: for women, the new country can offer opportunities for expression and independence not available to them previously, while men may instead experience a loss in status and authority. To the degree that women experience gains in gender equality when they move to more economically developed countries, they are more likely to want to settle permanently 'to protect their advances' (Pessar, 1999). In contrast, men show more interest in moving back to the country of origin where status and privileges are accorded to them more readily (Itzigsohn & Giorguli-Saucedo, 2005; Pessar, 1999). These differences in orientation to homeland have also been linked to the kinds of organizational involvement that immigrants have in their newly adopted countries. Men are more likely to be involved in political activities and social organizations that focus on the country of origin (Jones-Correa, 1998; Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). Women, in contrast, are more apt to direct their energies toward improving the lives of their families and their communities in the new country. Although a feminist consciousness may develop over the course of their involvement in the organization (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012), the initial focus of these women's activities is not necessarily gender *per se* (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Rather, consistent with the intersectional analysis that we are advocating here, issues of class, ethnicity, and legal status can significantly shape the agenda that both women and men set for themselves.

## **Collective Action by Immigrant Groups**

Individuals often find that their goals and aspirations can be more effectively addressed by collective action than by solitary choices and a consideration of these conjoint efforts

highlights the interface between immigrants and the larger societies that they have joined. Within the immigrant literature, examples of collective action are numerous, and we have selected a few that illustrate the ways in which women in particular join together to effect change.

### *Activism in the Muslim Community*

Different circumstances lead to different organizational objectives. In an analysis of dozens of migrant women's networks in Ireland, De Tona and Lentin (2011) described one group, NOUR, which consists of practicing Muslim women. These women have established a place where they can maintain some distance from patriarchal religious authorities while still preserving their religious faith. In their association with the group (sometimes persisting despite opposition from their husbands), the women have a resource that provides concrete and immediate help (e.g., advice on health problems or assistance in cases of domestic violence) and also shows them how to connect with state agencies and other organizations that have needed resources.

Other Muslim organizations have more political goals. In a survey of over 300 African American, Asian, and Arab Muslims in the United States, for example, Jamal (2005) found a clear link between involvement in a local mosque and political activity. This association was particularly strong for Arab Muslims, whose mosque attendance was directly correlated with political activity, civic participation, and group consciousness. Interestingly, among the Arabs, higher levels of reported political activity were associated with being single, female, older, and better educated.

In England, a Muslim women's organization, Al Masoom, was formed by a group of Pakistani women who participated in a Women in Black protest against the war in Bosnia–Herzegovina; at its height the group was reported to have mobilized thousands of men, women, and children (Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins & Reicher, 2006; Werbner, 2000). Al Masoom is noteworthy not only as an example of effective collective action by a

Muslim women's organization, but also because it so well demonstrates the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding mobilization, identity maintenance, and identity change (Greenwood, 2012). Hopkins and colleagues (2006) analyzed the ways in which the political activities of Al Masoom members triggered conflicts between the women and the men and how these conflicts opened avenues to empowerment, agency, and social change. These internal conflicts also created opportunities for the women to redefine what it means to be a Muslim woman in British society. Over time, the women came to reject certain religious traditions and customs as 'cultural backwardness' and to embrace the image of the Prophet Muhammad's wife, Ayesha, who is known for her 'boldness and wisdom' (Hopkins et al., 2006, p. 56).

Not surprisingly, given the experiences of Muslim women who choose to wear the *hijab*, a good deal of Muslim political energy is dedicated to mobilizing challenges to discrimination against Muslim women who wear the veil. Moore (2007) argues that Muslim women and advocacy groups mobilize secular principles of social equality and freedom not only to protect freedom of religious expression, but also to mobilize Muslim religious identity: 'The practice of *hijab* places Muslim women in the forefront of an effort to make Islam more visible, promoting a "public Islam" in a concrete and visible way via the circulation of Islamic symbols' (p. 248).

Haddad (2007) argues that in the aftermath of 9/11, increased surveillance, discrimination, and threats to Muslim's civil rights in Western societies has led to the strengthening of Muslim identity and the further development and instantiation of a bicultural Muslim American identity. Haddad's research demonstrated the ways in which the *hijab* has become a symbol of an American Islamic identity – a public affirmation of trust in the American system that guarantees freedom of religion and speech. At the same time, it has also become a symbol of anti-colonial solidarity and resistance to efforts to eradicate

Islam in an American environment that is increasingly seen as anti-Islamic (Haddad, 2007, p. 254).

### *Activism in the Latino/a Community*

Latino/a organizations in the United States offer another example of immigrant activism and the leadership roles that women and men take on. Older organizations, such as labor unions and home-town associations, are generally led by men, with the home-town associations most strongly male in membership as well, consistent with men's typically greater attachment to the country of origin. Community-based organizations, focusing on current conditions of work and family, are more likely to have female leadership. As one female leader of a community-based organization said, 'Women are more organized. We are the ones who are out in front' (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012, p. 16). Similarly, student groups are often predominantly female, in part reflecting the gender disparity in college attendance of Latino/as (Milkman & Terriquez, 2012). Many of the leaders of these newer organizations represent what is termed the 1.5 generation, that is, children who are born in another country but who migrate, typically with their parents, before the age of 10 or 12, and thus grow to adulthood in the new country.

Much of the activity of the newer migrant Latino/a groups in the United States is directed at changing legislation. Community-based worker centers, for example, are concerned with the jobs that are available to Latino/a workers and with the fair application of legal requirements for conditions of employment. Student groups have developed in recent years to advocate the passage of what is called the 'Dream Act', which would allow children who came to the United States at a young age with undocumented parents to attend college. Both types of organizations, as well as other more broad-based civil rights organizations, are active in working against various forms of punitive and prejudicial legislation recently enacted in several individual states (e.g., Arizona, Alabama, Georgia) that targets Latino/as.

In these Latino/a organizations, as in the Muslim groups, we see the complex interplay of demographics, tradition, and current context. Both the opportunities presented and the barriers erected frame the options that immigrants have and shape the agenda for their participation.

## CONCLUSION

Psychologists who have studied gender over the decades have typically come to realize that they could not stay cozily inside the boundaries of traditional psychology. Glances, if not forays, over the fence into disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, at a more macro level, as well as biology and genetics, at a more micro level, often help to frame psychological questions in wiser ways (Biernat & Deaux, 2012; Wood & Eagly, 2010). Recognition of how the intersectionality of social categories challenged simple 'main effect' analyses of gender added both nuance and complexity to the analyses. An analysis of immigration research presents a somewhat different trajectory but a shared agenda. In this case, psychologists were latecomers to the field, arriving much more recently to find ground already well cultivated by other social science disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, political science, and demography). The challenge here was not only to define a role for psychology but also to relate its emergent perspectives to the existing frameworks (Deaux, 2006).

The interface of gender and immigration necessarily requires a broad perspective. At the same time, we recognize the impossibility of covering everything that might be relevant to that interface. We focused on what are often termed 'visible minorities'. Yet, an interactional analysis would also reveal numerous ways in which religion and nationality (e.g., Russian Jews) moderate the whiteness that might otherwise make an immigrant group seem more homogeneous with the receiving society. Generational differences have also not been explored here, though this factor has important consequences in terms

of how immigrants interpret their situations and what actions they are willing to take (Deaux et al., 2007; Wiley et al., 2012; Wiley, Perkins, & Deaux, 2008).

The balance between generality and specificity is constantly at play in the study of gender and immigration. On the one hand, too much generality in forming hypotheses and interpretation is the enemy, covering up not only distinctively gendered patterns of behavior but also the intersections of gender with religion, ethnicity, and the like. We have, for that reason, introduced numerous specific exemplars, grounded in country and culture as well as illustrative of gender. Yet while these case studies can vividly point to key phenomena, it is also our task to find common themes in the immigrant experience. These themes can serve as organizing principles, pointing the way toward models that consider contexts and contingencies, moderators and mediators, and that allow space for variation while providing insight on process.

## NOTES

- 1 Donato et al. (2011) use age-standardized data as well as unstandardized data, to take into account the greater longevity of women that increases their representation in the overall immigrant population. With unstandardized figures, the proportion of immigrant women in the United States was closer to 55% in the 1970s and 1980s.
- 2 *Mestizo* means 'mixed', and Anzaldúa (1999) coined the feminine version of this term to refer to Latin American women who live in the borderland between two cultures (p. 100).

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# A Cultural Psychology of Relationship: Toward a Transnational Feminist Psychology

Tuğçe Kurtiş and Glenn Adams

Psychologists interested in human rights and social justice sometimes find themselves facing conflicting concerns of gender inequality and cultural imperialism. An extreme version of this tension is the appropriation of women's rights discourse in the global war on terror, as European and US leaders cite defense of women's rights as a justification for ongoing military intervention in Afghanistan and elsewhere (see Stabile & Kumar, 2005). On the one hand, standing with feminist scholars who work for gender liberation, one might applaud efforts to extend women's freedom, dignity, and range of life options in contexts of appalling oppression. On the other hand, standing with postcolonial scholars who work for global social justice, one might note how advocates of colonial expansion have frequently claimed women's liberation as a justification for imperialist intervention. These forms of 'colonial feminism' held that European colonization was

primarily a 'civilizing mission' that resulted in liberation of women from allegedly barbaric cultural practices of many colonized peoples (Ahmed, 1992, pp. 151–153). In these and other cases, apologists for colonial expansion have often won public support for intervention by appealing to a moral duty for 'white men [to save] brown women from brown men' (Spivak, 1999, p. 93; see also Mohanty, 1991).

We have encountered a similar tension in our work on cultural-psychological foundations of relationship. We conduct much of this work in settings where phenomena such as arranged marriage and an emphasis on role complementarity (versus intimate equality) as a basis of life partnerships are normative practices. On the one hand, resonating with concerns of feminist scholars, the tendency in mainstream psychological science is to regard these and similar practices as harmful or oppressive and to prescribe interventions to

change them. On the other hand, resonating with concerns of postcolonial scholars, people in target communities often protest that the supposedly enlightened prescriptions that accompany foreign interventions constitute a form of cultural imperialism that does more harm than good.

The need to resolve this tension between liberation-oriented forms of psychology – feminist psychology perspectives and cultural psychology perspectives – leads us to articulate the possibility of a *transnational feminist psychology*. We first consider parallels and divergences between feminist psychology and cultural psychology perspectives. We then examine how these considerations manifest in research on cultural-psychological foundations of relationship. Finally, we trace the outline of a transnational feminist psychology as an intellectual tool for resolving these conflicting concerns. To foreshadow a main point, a transnational feminist psychology draws upon the context-sensitive vision of cultural psychology to re-think universalizing discourses of hegemonic science, thereby illuminating ways of being that better serve interests of liberation not only among women in marginalized spaces, but also for humanity in general.

## **CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY: WHAT IS IT?**

A cultural psychology analysis considers the dynamic relationship of mutual constitution by which psychology and culture ‘make each other up’ (Shweder, 1990, p. 1; see also Adams, 2012). Although perspectives vary, a unifying characteristic is the potential of cultural psychology analyses to serve as an antidote to universalizing discourses of mainstream psychological science (Adams, Kurtiş, Salter, & Anderson, 2012). Based to a disproportionate extent on research informed by Western, Educated, Industrial, Rich, and Democratic (or WEIRD; see Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) realities, conventional scientific accounts often

portray particular varieties of relationship – for example, authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1968), secure attachment (Bowlby, 1969), or emotional intimacy via self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973) – as optimal forms. Imposing these forms as a universal standard, conventional accounts tend to portray patterns of relationship in many majority-world settings – that is, among people associated with the ‘developing world’ who represent the majority of humankind (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1995)<sup>1</sup> – in a relatively pathologizing light: for example, as authoritarian parenting, insecure attachment, or self-silencing.

In contrast to the tendency of conventional accounts to pathologize practices of cultural others, a cultural psychology analysis proposes two decolonizing strategies (Adams & Salter, 2007). The first strategy is to normalize the patterns of experience, typical of cultural others, that mainstream approaches portray as deviant or suboptimal. In other words, a cultural psychology analysis examines the extent to which patterns of experience regarded with suspicion from a conventional scientific standpoint may instead provide viable paths to human welfare. The second strategy is to de-normalize or de-naturalize patterns of experience that mainstream research tends to portray as standard. In other words, a cultural psychology analysis reveals the extent to which patterns of experience that conventional accounts regard as normal or optimal are not mere expressions of context-free human nature, but are themselves products of engagement with particular cultural ecologies – especially the WEIRD spaces that disproportionately inform mainstream psychological science.

## **Points of Contact with Feminist Psychology**

Even in this necessarily brief overview of a cultural psychology analysis, one can note strong parallels with feminist perspectives in psychology. Just as cultural psychology analyses critique pathologizing portrayals of cultural others’ experience, so too do feminist

psychology perspectives critique ‘deficit model’ accounts of women’s experience. In fact, a primary concern of feminist psychologists has been to contest the ways in which psychology constructs women as the devalued other (Weisstein, 1968). Resonating with the normalizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis, feminist psychology perspectives hold that patterns of women’s experience are not pathological deviations from some (implicitly male) standard, but instead constitute optimal paths to healthy adjustment and optimal functioning (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Chodorow, 1978). Resonating with the denaturalizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis, feminist perspectives challenge the androcentric character of conventional standards in psychological science. They note that prevailing standards do not reflect a positionless ‘view from nowhere’ (Nagel, 1989), but instead reflect particular varieties of male experience (e.g., Bem, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Hegarty, Parslow, Ansara, & Quick, Chapter 3 this volume). In turn, this practice of shifting one’s standpoint or ‘turning the lens’ (Harding, 1991; see also Adams & Salter, 2007) to interrogate the normative standard helps to illuminate how male experience is itself the product of engagement with gendered affordances rather than the ‘natural’ expression of male biology (e.g., Connell, 1995; Bosson, Vandello, & Caswell, Chapter 8 this volume).

### ***Points of Tension with Feminist Psychology***

Despite these similarities, the intersection of feminist and cultural psychology perspectives also reveals important tensions that are particularly evident in phenomena related to personal relationship. Feminist theorists have illuminated how prevailing research in cultural psychology tends to imply that women and men inhabit a unitary cultural space, thereby obscuring the operation of gendered power in ways that are antithetical to feminist political goals (Burman, 2005). For example, scholars and activists have

argued that, by elevating ‘oppressive practices’ (e.g., polygamous marriage or wearing headscarves) to the status of ‘cultural traditions’, a cultural-psychological emphasis on local understanding can function to legitimize patriarchal control that poses a threat to universal human rights and women’s well-being.

Conversely, a cultural psychology analysis illuminates how conventional varieties of feminist psychology with roots in WEIRD cultural spaces often export and impose universalizing constructions of gendered experience, drawing attention away from different constructions of gender across settings. One problem with this failure to account for diversity in the construction of gender is the reproduction of essentializing or marginalizing views of the ‘Other’ associated with such oppressive ideological systems as racism and Orientalism (e.g., Fanon, 1963; Said, 1978). This fascination with ‘barbaric’ gender practices of exotic others serves a false sense of cultural superiority and exposes people to danger by directing attention away from typically obscured forms of everyday gender oppression that operate in WEIRD settings. (see also Grabe, Chapter 25 this volume)

## **CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELATIONSHIP**

How does the intersection of feminist and cultural psychology manifest in a particular case? In the following section we describe our research on cultural-psychological foundations of relationship and consider some points of intersection with perspectives of feminist psychology.

### ***Theoretical Overview***

One of the earliest contributions of feminist psychology was to illuminate the extent to which prescriptive models of self and well-being that inform mainstream psychological science are not ‘just natural’. Instead, these models constitute an androcentric conception that valorizes separateness and personal agency

typical of dominant male experience and tends to pathologize the connection and relational agency associated with women's experience. In response to these androcentric understandings of self and person, feminist scholars examined the benefits of relational selfhood and 'women's ways of knowing' (Belenky et al., 1986) more generally.

### *Cultural-Psychological Foundations of Self and Agency*

Markus and Kitayama (1991) drew heavily on feminist work in their famous paper on cultural variation in self. Resonating with the feminist critique of androcentrism in psychology, they proposed that theory and research in psychological science has primarily considered (and treated as an ethnocentric standard) historically particular patterns of experience associated with *independent self-construal*: an atomistic construction of self as a bounded entity that is inherently separate from social and physical context. Subsequent work has linked independent constructions of self with *disjoint models of agency* in which people experience action as the product of discrete actors abstracted from context (Markus & Kitayama, 2004); *analytic tendencies* of perception and cognition that focus attention on properties of entities as the primary unit of reality (e.g., Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001); *promotion, growth, or expansion motivations* to express authentic dispositions and take advantage of opportunities for self-enhancement (e.g., Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997); emphases on personal or *subjective meaning of emotional experience* (Mesquita, 2001); and preference for *high-arousal positive affective states* (e.g., *fun*; Tsai, 2007).

Inspired by work in feminist psychology, Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested that the more typical patterns in human communities across time and space have been understandings of self-in-relation, which they referred to as *interdependent self-construal*. Subsequent work has linked interdependent constructions of self with *conjoint models of agency* in which people experience action as a

joint product of contextualized actors in concert with social or relational forces (Markus & Kitayama, 2004); *holistic tendencies* of perception and cognition that focus attention on contextual forces or relationships as the primary unit of reality (e.g., Nisbett et al., 2001); *preventive maintenance motivations* to meet obligations, live up to social expectations, maintain harmony, and attend to domains that require self-improvement (e.g., Kitayama et al., 1997); emphases on consensual or *objective meaning of emotional experience* (Mesquita, 2001); and preference for *low-arousal positive affective states* (e.g., contentment; Tsai, 2007).

### *Implications for Personal Relationship*

Our research group has applied a similar framework to the study of personal relationship. This work begins with the recognition that people – regardless of gender or setting – value and require relationship as a basis for healthy psychological functioning. Accordingly, our focus is not on variation in the value of personal relationship, but instead the extent to which local ecologies promote experience of relationship as either (a) the pursuit of satisfying connection between relatively unconstrained actors or (b) the cautious management of multiple obligations in overlapping networks of embedded connection.<sup>2</sup>

In particular, our framework suggests that the relevant feature of independent self for personal relationship is a relatively open, *expansion-oriented* experience of relational belonging as a somewhat voluntary, effortful choice of atomistic 'free agents' who strive to create connection in contexts of inherent separation (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004). Independent constructions of self afford uninhibited pursuit of pleasurable companionship and a sense of freedom both to choose attractive partners and to avoid onerous obligations (e.g., to relatives). Contrary to prevailing stereotypes about relationship-devaluing individualists, this framework associates independent self-construal with many of the relational tendencies that conventional scientific wisdom portrays as optimal standards: for example, creation of a relatively large network of intimate friends (Adams &



Plaut, 2003); a sense of freedom from enemies (Adams, 2005); an emphasis on verbally oriented, emotional intimacy as the essence of social support (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008); patterns of authoritative parenting characterized by verbal give-and-take (Baumrind, 1989); and an emphasis on self-disclosure as a mechanism for establishing intimacy and communion across the space of inherent interpersonal separation (Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010).

Likewise, and contrary to stereotypes about connection-valuing collectivists, our framework suggests that the relevant feature of interdependent self for personal relationship is a relatively careful, *maintenance-oriented* experience of relational belonging as embeddedness in environmentally afforded connection. Interdependent constructions afford painstaking management of obligations as the essence of social support (Kim et al., 2008; see also Adams & Plaut, 2003) and foster acute awareness of the potential hazards of embeddedness in overlapping networks of enduring interpersonal connection (Adams, 2005). In the West African settings that inform much of our research, these conceptions find expression in tendencies for people to report a relatively small number of friends (Adams & Plaut, 2003), to be vigilant for attacks from envious personal enemies (Adams, 2005), to emphasize the materiality versus emotionality of care and support (Coe, 2011; see also Kim et al., 2008), and to emphasize silence and concealment rather than self-disclosure and revelation (e.g., Ferme, 2001; Shaw, 2000).

### *Similarity and Tension with Feminist Psychology Perspectives*

Points of similarity and tension between this framework and canonical feminist perspectives arise in portrayals of maintenance-oriented relationality. A point of similarity is the critique of otherness. Feminist perspectives have been highly effective at illuminating and critiquing how conventional psychological science pathologizes women's experience and portrays it as 'Other' to an androcentric norm. Inspired by

feminist perspectives, our work attempts to illuminate and critique how conventional scientific approaches pathologize maintenance-oriented relationality and portray it as 'other' to an ethnocentric, expansion-oriented norm.

A point of tension with feminist perspectives concerns implications for understandings of gender oppression. Canonical perspectives of feminist psychology tend to share tendencies of conventional psychological science to pathologize the maintenance-oriented forms of relationality characteristic of ecologies of embedded interdependence. In particular, one might regard these forms of relationality as manifestations of gender oppression to the extent that the associated constraints on choice, obligations of silence, or burdens of care fall heavily on women. From this perspective, liberatory practice requires interventions that promote expansion-oriented forms of relationality that provide people with opportunities for self-expression and the pursuit of maximally satisfying connections.

In response, decolonizing strategies of a cultural psychology analysis suggest an alternative account that resonates with perspectives in postcolonial studies. The normalizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis proposes that maintenance-oriented varieties of relationship are not necessarily manifestations of pathology; instead, they constitute viable paths to human welfare that embody important insights about human experience. Likewise, the de-naturalizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis proposes that expansion-oriented standards of mainstream science are not 'just natural' expressions of optimal human development; instead, they are the product of particular realities – including neoliberal individualism and androcentric constructions of relationship – that mainstream scientific work typically obscures.

### ***The Cultural Psychology of Attraction Processes***

To illuminate these similarities and tensions in the context of a concrete example, consider research on the cultural-psychological

foundations of attraction processes. The theoretical framework that we outlined in the preceding section suggests that the importance of attraction as a determinant of relationship outcomes varies across cultural-ecological contexts. In particular, it suggests that the importance of attraction and attractiveness – whether based on physical appearance, attitude similarity, compatible personality, or any rationale for preferring one interaction partner over another – will be greatest in WEIRD ecologies associated with independent self-construal. The reason is that these ecologies promote an experience of individual abstraction from context and a corresponding construction of relational affiliation as the more-or-less agentic choice of inherently separate selves. One can hypothesize that it is precisely within such ecologies of abstracted independence that preference (as a basis of choice) and attraction (as a basis of preference) figure prominently as a force in everyday social life (e.g., Iyengar & Lepper, 2000; Savani, Markus, & Conner, 2008; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). In contrast, our theoretical framework emphasizes that cultural ecologies associated with interdependent self-construal (i.e., the more typical situation of human communities across time and space) promote an experience of individual embeddedness in context and a corresponding construction of relational affiliation as a somewhat ‘given’ consequence of an individual’s social location. Because choice matters less as a basis for relational affiliation within such cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence, one can hypothesize that attraction of whatever sort – again, whether on the basis of similarity, good personality, or physical appearance – will not figure prominently as a force in everyday life.

Support for this hypothesis comes from research that compared the relationship between physical appearance and life outcomes among participants at a large university in the Midwest United States (associated in previous research with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence) and a large university in the West African country of Ghana (associated in previous research with

cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence). In a first study (Anderson, Adams, & Plaut, 2008, Study 1), participants completed outcome measures of life quality and satisfaction both in general and in the specific contexts of kinship, mating, and friend relationships, which vary along a theoretically relevant dimension from low to high exercise of choice. To assess physical appearance, we photographed participants and asked same-nation, independent judges to rate the photographs on the dimension of attractiveness.

Results provided support for hypothesized variation in the appearance-outcome relationship along two dimensions. First, results confirmed the association between coder-rated ‘good looks’ and participant-reported relationship outcomes only for American participants: that is, in the setting associated with ecologies of abstracted independence and a corresponding construction of relational affiliation as agentic choice. Consistent with our hypothesis, this association between ‘good looks’ and positive outcomes was not evident for Ghanaian participants: that is, in the setting associated with ecologies of embedded interdependence and a corresponding construction of relational affiliation as environmental affordance. Second, even within American settings, the association between coder-rated appearance and participant-rated outcomes was most evident for friendship, the relationship domain that offers the greatest exercise of choice. The association with appearance did not extend to kinship and mating outcomes, relationship domains that afford less exercise of repeated choice.<sup>3</sup>

Additional support for the hypothesized link between the importance of attraction and cultural ecologies of abstracted independence (or irrelevance of attraction in cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence) comes from another study in which we analyzed archival data from a representative sample of US residents (Plaut, Adams, & Anderson, 2009). This survey included measures of life satisfaction and quality of social relations, which we used as our measure of

life outcomes. Although it is uncommon for national surveys to include measures of physical appearance, this particular survey did include waist and hip measurements from which we could calculate a measure – waist-to-hip ratio (WHR) – that researchers have associated with ratings of physical attractiveness for women (e.g., Henss, 2000). (To our disappointment, the survey did not include information from which to calculate a measure of physical attractiveness for men.)

As in previous research, we investigated the hypothesis that the association between attractiveness ratings and life outcomes would be more positive in cultural ecologies of abstracted independence than in cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence. As all survey respondents were residents in the United States, we did not evaluate the hypothesis via cross-national comparison. Instead, we compared participants in high-mobility, urban settings and in low-mobility, rural settings, which previous research has associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence and embedded interdependence, respectively (see Adams & Plaut, 2003; Kashima et al., 2004; Oishi & Kisling, 2009). Among women in urban settings, results revealed a strong association between appearance and quality of friend relations (but, as our theoretical framework and previous research suggest, not quality of family relations) that mediated a similar association between appearance and life satisfaction. In contrast, results revealed no such associations between appearance and either quality of friend relations or life satisfaction among women in rural settings.

### *Does 'Freedom of Choice' Liberate or Constrain?*

Although we originally conducted these studies to examine contextual variation in the importance of attraction, we review them here to illuminate issues at the intersection of feminist and cultural psychology. A first issue concerns competing conceptions of pathology and liberation. As we noted, conventional perspectives of both mainstream and feminist

psychology tend to regard cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence in relatively pathologizing terms because these settings promote attention to obligation, role prescriptions, and other conditions that place constraints on the exercise of choice and impede the pursuit of maximum personal satisfaction. The flipside of this portrayal is that, because cultural ecologies of abstracted independence afford freedom from obligation and open exercise of choice, they liberate women (and men) to pursue more satisfying lives. This conventional account implies a benign interpretation of the importance of attraction in everyday life. According to this interpretation, the association between attractiveness and life outcomes in cultural ecologies of abstracted independence is evidence that people with attractive qualities are at liberty to pursue more satisfying friendships and other social relations than they could pursue in 'more restrictive' cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence.

Decolonizing strategies of a cultural psychology analysis suggest an alternative to this pathologizing interpretation. Rather than oppressive systems that inhibit the pursuit of satisfaction by constraining freedom of choice, a normalizing account emphasizes that the more 'restrictive,' maintenance-oriented relationality associated with ecologies of embedded interdependence can have considerable benefits. Although it may constrain opportunities for people with attractive qualities to build maximally pleasurable connection, the experience of environmentally afforded connection constitutes a relational safety net that provides nearly everyone in the community with the assurance of relational belongingness and support (Bohannon, 1971), perhaps somewhat regardless of whether they possess qualities that other people find attractive. Similarly, rather than a categorically progressive force that liberates people from burdens of obligation, a denaturalizing account emphasizes that expansion-oriented relationality associated with ecologies of abstracted independence has considerable risks. In particular, the apparent liberation that these settings afford comes at

the cost of disruption to environmentally afforded connection that can leave ordinary people, who possess less spectacularly attractive qualities, at risk for worse outcomes than they would enjoy in more restrictive socio-cultural ecologies.

Evidence that bears on this discussion comes from the study of archival data that we described in the previous section (Plaut et al., 2009). A regions-of-significance analysis indicates some evidence of a 'liberation' pattern, but only among a very select group of women at the extremely high end of the attractiveness distribution (i.e., who reported low WHR). These women experienced higher quality friend relations and more life satisfaction if they inhabited the high mobility ecology of urban settings rather than the relatively restrictive ecology of rural settings. However, among the much larger group of women in the middle-to-low range of the attractiveness distribution (i.e., who reported high WHR), the regions of significance analysis indicated a 'risk' pattern, such that women experienced lower quality friend relations and worse life satisfaction in urban settings than in rural settings. For present purposes, these results suggest hesitation about the liberatory benefits of expansion-oriented relationality. Rather than liberating women (and men) to create high-quality social connections of their own choosing, the more relevant consequence of these relational forms is to impose a burden of attracting social support and connection in the absence of enduring, environmentally afforded connection.

### *The Sexualization of Attraction Research*

A second issue at the intersection of feminist and cultural psychology concerns the sexualization of attraction research. Our work resonates with early research on the bases of attraction – for example, propinquity (Festinger, Schachter, & Back, 1950), similarity (Byrne, 1961), and even appearance (Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Eagly, Ashmore, Maghijani, & Longo, 1991) – in that it considers attraction in a general sense as a force that leads people to affiliate with others across a range of relationship forms.

In contrast, recent work has typically considered a more sexualized conception of attraction as a phenomenon of mate selection. This contrast is most vivid in our study of the association between participant appearance and self-reported outcomes in friendship and mating relationships (Anderson et al., 2008, Study 1). A sexualized conception of attraction implies a stronger appearance-outcome association for mating than friend relationship. Instead, we hypothesized and observed a stronger appearance-outcome association in the more 'open' domain of friendship than the less open domain of mating (which entails greater constraints on the exercise of repeated choice).

The sexualization of attraction research corresponds to a rise in the power and popularity of evolutionary psychology perspectives. Although a review of evolutionary perspectives on attraction is beyond the scope of this chapter, the relevance for the present discussion has been their focus on sex differences in the importance of physical appearance as a determinant of mate preference (e.g., Bjorklund & Shackelford, 1999; Hinde, 1984). Specifically, these perspectives propose that evolutionary pressures have shaped men's desires such that they place greater emphasis on physical appearance than do women, whereas evolutionary pressures have shaped women's desires such that they place greater emphasis on resource-relevant attributes than do men. Researchers have found evidence of such sex differences in mating preferences across several national settings, leading some observers to argue for their basis in innate characteristics of the human species (e.g., Buss, 1989).

Feminist psychologists have extensively critiqued this idea that sex differences in mate preference are simply a product of differential genetic evolution. Instead they propose that gendered patterns of mate preference reflect the differential affordances that sociocultural ecologies provide to women and men (e.g., Eagly, 1987). For instance, social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 1999) posits that women and men select

mates on the basis of criteria that reflect the divergent responsibilities of their particular social roles (e.g., caregiving for women, wage-earning for men). In support of this idea, a re-analysis of Buss' (1989) 37-nation study of mate selection indicated that sex-differentiated mate preferences were less pronounced in more gender-egalitarian nations where traditional gender roles were less salient (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Beyond competing accounts of gender differences, a cultural psychology analysis emphasizes how this focus on attraction as a force in mate selection, within both evolutionary psychology perspectives and feminist psychology critiques, constitutes a construction of relationship as a 'coital and conjugal' space (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). This phrase comes from work by African feminist scholars to highlight the tendency of conventional social science to regard (African) women, through an androcentric lens, in terms of their relevance for men's experience. The androcentric construction of relationship as a coital and conjugal space implies a construction of love as self-indulgent intimacy and sexual passion. It directs attention of researchers and practitioners away from other relationship forms – for example, sibling, parent–child, relative – that imply constructions of love as socially responsible care and obligation. The conception of relationship as a coital and conjugal space becomes even more evident when one considers psychological research on the topic of dating/mating relationship.

### ***The Cultural Psychology of Dating/Mating Relationship Processes***

The construction of relationship as primarily coital and conjugal is not limited to the sexualization of attraction research, but also informs the understanding of other relationship phenomena. Indeed, most studies of love and personal relationship 'in general' are studies of dating/mating relationship (Adams et al., 2004). Even when research purports to examine basic relationship processes, the conception of these processes bears the imprint of the

'coital and conjugal' construction and reveals the broader sexualization of relational belonging (e.g., in conceptions of satisfaction). For example, the construction of relationship as coital and conjugal is evident in a *nuclear model of family relations* that dominates mainstream psychological science. Implicit in this model is the idea that 'family' centers around the 'sacred' (Shweder et al., 1995) conjugal couple and persists as long as that pairing remains intact. Likewise, the construction of relationship as coital and conjugal is evident in the strong association of 'true' love with the adjective *romantic*. Resonating with other uses of the word (e.g., to describe genres of art or literature), the adjective 'romantic' implies an expansion-oriented construction of love that emphasizes mutual exploration, authentic self-expression, and self-expansive merging in emotion-focused intimacy with a partner of one's choosing (e.g., Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Dion & Dion, 1993). This construction de-emphasizes any association of true love with provision of material care, instead portraying dutiful fulfillment of obligation as a form of unjust imposition that requires personal sacrifice.

The theoretical framework that we apply for investigating the cultural-psychological foundations of relationship proposes that the valorization of dating/mating relationship, nuclearization of family relations, and sexualization of love in mainstream psychology, reflect the basis of scientific imagination in cultural ecologies of abstracted independence. These cultural ecologies afford an expansion-oriented experience of relational belonging as the voluntary creation of 'free agents' who are at liberty (but also compelled) to choose the relationships into which they invest their energy. The experience of choice is relevant not only at the stage of relationship 'initiation', in which a person decides with whom to affiliate, but also at the stage of relationship maintenance, as people decide whether current levels of satisfaction and commitment justify their continued investment (Rusbult, 1980).<sup>4</sup> Within this model, a high quality connection



is one in which partners do not impose burdensome obligations of care, but instead provide each other with the emotional support necessary for self-expansive growth, exploration, and expression of each partner's authentic personal self.

These constructions of love and family contrast with the *kinship model of family relations* and materiality of love and care (Coe, 2011) that inform relationship experience in many West African settings. These models of relationality propose that 'true' love exists in 'primary' relationships of birth rather than 'secondary' relationships of choice (including conjugal relationships). Within these models, conjugal relationship is primarily an arrangement between kinship groups who bring together two members for purposes of reproduction, and a successful marriage is one in which each partner occupies separate spheres of activity, maintains respectful emotional distance, and dutifully performs complementary obligations to the other partner. There is no expectation of emotionally intimate companionship; indeed, it is not uncommon to hear warnings against excessive intimacy as a source of disruption within and between larger kinship groups. Rather than prioritize (impulsive) personal expression and growth, this model prescribes maturity and self-restraint, especially in cases where 'authentic' self-expression is disruptive of relational and collective harmony.

### *Critical Feminist Perspectives*

Conventional scientific wisdom in mainstream social psychology typically portrays dating/mating relationship and romantic love in a celebratory light as a primary source of life satisfaction and typically remains silent about the downside of such relationship (Rook & Pietromonaco, 1987). In contrast, feminist perspectives have played an important role in drawing attention to the potential risks of this relationship form. Scholars not only have emphasized how dating/mating relationship is often a source of stress and violence (see Ball, Paluck, & Fletcher, Chapter 22 this volume), but also have linked institutionalized forms of

dating/mating relationship (e.g., marriage) with patriarchy and exploitation of women (Glenn, 1997). This cautionary characterization of dating/mating relationship is particularly evident in early feminist portrayals of romantic love as a means of women's 'enslavement' (Beauvoir, 1988, p. 653) and 'a psychological pivot in the persecution of women' (Atkinson, 1974, p. 43).

Discussions of patriarchal oppression in dating/mating relationship are nowhere more strident than in Western feminist portrayals of various majority-world settings. Under Western feminist gaze, a wide range of relationship practices that women engage in across a variety of majority-world settings – including sati, dowry, polygamy, and arranged marriage – fall under the rubric of 'gender oppression' in the 'third world'. This portrayal not only constructs diverse societies as a homogenous cultural 'other', but also suggests that women in these diverse settings are victims of their own traditions and at risk of 'death by culture' (Narayan, 1997).

The tendency to pathologize patterns of 'other' experience extends beyond practices of polygamy and arranged marriage to more ambiguous features of relational life. As an example, consider Silencing the Self Theory (STST; Jack, 1991), which conceptualizes women's silence and care in dating/mating relationship as evidence of gender oppression. Briefly, STST proposes that women inhibit self-expression or action if these are likely to produce conflict with partners, which in turn leads to their 'loss of self' (Jack, 1991). Moreover, STST suggests that women put the needs of relationship partners before their own desires, which becomes a form of 'care as self-sacrifice' (Jack, 1991). Numerous studies associate women's self-silencing in dating/mating relationship with a wide variety of negative health outcomes, such as depression (Jack & Dill, 1992), eating pathologies (Frank & Thomas, 2003), and coronary heart disease (Eaker & Kelly-Hayes, 2010). From this perspective, maintenance-oriented emphases on silence (in the service of relationship

harmony) and care (as an expression of true love) are gendered phenomena that disproportionately jeopardize women's well-being.

To the extent that prevailing practices of relationship in many majority-world settings emphasize self-restraint and mutual obligations of care, mainstream perspectives of psychological science suggest that they put people at risk for low-quality relationship and less fulfilling lives. To the extent that obligations of restraint and care are especially relevant for women, one might identify these relational forms as evidence of rampant patriarchy and gender oppression. In contrast, our work draws upon decolonizing strategies of a cultural psychology analysis to re-think these conclusions.

### *Silence as Authentic Expression of Relational Self*

Without denying the potentially oppressive consequences of specific relationship practices in particular majority-world settings, the normalizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis invites observers to re-think these patterns of relationship in terms of broader constructions of reality in which some patterns may be beneficial. As an example, consider again conventional scientific wisdom regarding self-restraint and silence in relationship. Rather than a deficit in relationality or a sign of universal gender oppression, a cultural psychology perspective identifies practices of self-restraint or silence as a feature of maintenance-oriented forms of relationship associated with cultural worlds of embedded interdependence. Practices of mutual disclosure for the production of intimacy may be unnecessary in worlds where people experience relatively stable networks of connection. Moreover, to the extent that cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence are associated with densely overlapping networks of connection, they afford greater possibility for harm through violations of privacy and provide little opportunity to escape disruptions of interpersonal conflict. Accordingly, people in these settings may best ensure psychological

well-being through guarded management of information rather than open disclosure and by practicing restraint rather than impulsively giving voice to unconsidered reactions (Ferre, 2001; Shaw, 2000).

Evidence for these ideas comes from a survey study of women in Turkish settings (Kurtiş, 2009), which scholars have associated with cultural ecologies of interdependence (e.g., Imamoğlu, 1987; Kağıtçıbaşı, 1973). Participants completed measures of self-silencing (including 'care as self-sacrifice'), relationship satisfaction, and depression. Contrary to theory and research in North American settings linking self-silencing to depression and low relationship satisfaction (Harper & Welsh, 2007; Jack & Dill, 1992) – but consistent with the normalizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis – self-silencing scores of these Turkish women were unrelated to depression and predicted *greater* relationship satisfaction. Moreover, 'care as self-sacrifice' scores predicted *lower* depression and did not harm relationship satisfaction.

An interview study among a different sample of Turkish participants helps to illuminate motivations for restrained silence. Some participants mentioned privacy maintenance: that is, 'choosing not to share' information (often regarding primary loyalties to families of birth) that they deemed to be a private concern. Other participants mentioned indirect communication style, emphasizing that successful communication of desires via nonverbal means validated expectations of being understood through their 'natural reactions' and contributed to a satisfying experience of implicit common ground. Still other participants mentioned conflict management: that is, 'choosing to keep quiet' in order to prevent the escalation of conflict. In general, these participants noted how silence frequently served as a tool to preserve or affirm relationship quality. As such, they considered silence to be a better tool for expression of an authentic self – constituted largely by relationship – than did direct forms of disclosure that implied distance from partners or risked the long-term

pain of conflict for the short-term gain of expressing momentary annoyances.

Similarly, interview participants described care as behavior that is expressive of their authentic identity rather than a 'sacrifice' that is at odds with their personal needs and desires. Their responses are reminiscent of earlier work by Miller (1994), who linked duty-based conceptions of care to cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence. In contrast to the conception of care as voluntary choice associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence, Miller (1994) suggests that people within cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence experience care as duty and obligation congruent with – and not opposed to – authentic manifestations of self. Rather than oppressing or subordinating the individual to the requirements of the relationship that results in 'self-sacrifice' or 'loss of self', duty-based care allows one to express or realize her authentic self.

Although still in its initial stages, results of this research are consistent with the hypothesis that silence and care are not antithetical to authentic personal desires and do not necessarily constitute threats to (women's) well-being. In fact, these relationship practices may even be expressive of authentic personal desires and promotive of well-being.

### *Expression-Oriented Relationality as Neoliberal Individualism*

Besides normalizing patterns that conventional accounts portray as pathological, the de-naturalizing strategy of a cultural psychology analysis interrogates patterns that mainstream accounts portray as standards of optimal functioning and gender justice. For example, consider a study that examined allocation of scarce health care resources in the context of competing obligations to different relationship partners among participants in a North American and a West African setting (Salter & Adams, 2012). The inspiration for the study was a West African dilemma tale in which the protagonist's spouse and mother are drowning and the protagonist must choose which person to

save. The prescriptive response in most accounts of the dilemma tale is that one should save the mother (Bascom, 1975). Consistent with this sensibility – and resonating with kinship models of family relations and filial conceptions of love (as material care) – participants in the West African setting tended to resolve competing obligations in the allocation task by prioritizing care to parents and relatives over care to spouses. In contrast, resonating with nuclear models of family relations, and emphases on 'emotionality' of care – participants in the North American setting tended to resolve competing obligations by prioritizing care to spouses over care to parents and broader relatives (Salter & Adams, 2012).

In the absence of the comparison with West African spaces, one might be inclined to regard the North American 'standard' prioritization of spouse over kin as a straightforward consequence of the 'natural' affective intensity associated with romantic/conjugal relationship. Instead, the contrast with West African settings helps to locate the nuclearization of love and care in neoliberal individualist forms of subjectivity (and free-market relationality) associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence. People concentrate their resources of care and affection in nuclear relationships at the expense of broader networks because they experience the former as expressions of their own self-direction into which they choose to invest their energy.

Evidence for this link between cultural ecologies of abstracted independence and nuclearization of care comes from the same study of health resource allocation – specifically, in a comparison among West African participants as a function of engagement with different religious communities. Numerous observers have noted how the widespread global popularity of Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) both reflects and promotes an experience of neoliberal individualism (e.g., Meyer, 2004). The reference here is not just the sense of breaking 'accidental' ties with family and relatives to be 'born again'

into a new community that expresses one's authentic identity, but also to economic ideologies that justify selfish accumulation (rather than broad distribution) of wealth as a moral good. To the extent that engagement with PCCs promotes experience of neoliberal individualism, the investigators hypothesized and observed that the nuclearization of care – manifested in the tendency to resolve competing obligations by prioritizing care to spouses – was greater among Ghanaian participants who attended PCCs than Ghanaian participants who attended other churches (Salter & Adams, 2012).

To summarize, a cultural psychology analysis helps to illuminate how the nuclear model of family relations and 'romantic' forms of conjugal relationship are not a natural or optimal standard. Instead, this analysis links such patterns of relationality to ideologies of neoliberal individualism associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence (see Giddens, 1991; Olicker, 1998). This link to neoliberal individualism in turn helps to illuminate potential dangers of such relational forms. Although nuclearization of family relations might provide opportunities to pursue personal pleasure and fulfillment, it leaves many people (e.g., elders) without effective social support. Similarly, although global discourses of romantic love tend to 'romanticize' its liberatory qualities (e.g., freeing women from patriarchal oppression), ethnographic research in a variety of majority-world spaces suggests that women are at risk for considerable disempowerment and economic hardship when they forego the assurance of environmentally afforded connection for the alluring promises of romance (Cole & Thomas, 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). Even in WEIRD settings, research suggests that conjugal relationship is less beneficial for women's health than men's (e.g., Umberson, 1992). In short, although conventional wisdom in psychological science emphasizes the health-promoting or liberatory potential of ideologies of romance and expansion-oriented relationship, a cultural psychology analysis draws upon perspectives of postcolonial studies to consider how these

ways of being can also sustain gender inequality and social injustice.

## CONCLUSION

In an attempt to resolve these and other tensions between perspectives of cultural and feminist psychology, we draw upon interdisciplinary discussions in both postcolonial and feminist studies to propose a *transnational feminist psychology*. A transnational feminist psychology shares with feminist perspectives a concern for gender oppression. However, it diverges from mainstream feminist perspectives that portray majority-world spaces as sites of ignorance waiting for neocolonial intervention. Instead, a transnational feminist psychology resonates with context-sensitive strategies of a cultural psychology analysis, which take the epistemological position of people in particular, majority-world settings as a resource to decolonize conventional scientific wisdom and illuminate concepts more conducive to broader human liberation (Martín-Baró, 1994; see also Adams et al., 2012).

At the same time, a transnational feminist psychology does not deny that local practices of relationship – in majority-world spaces and elsewhere – often reflect and reproduce patriarchal oppression. Where it deviates from mainstream perspectives of feminist psychology is in its response to this oppression. Despite their otherwise critical formulations of heterosexual relationship and romance, mainstream perspectives of feminist psychology share with conventional wisdom in psychological science a celebratory understanding of expansion-oriented relationality as a liberatory manifestation of women's interdependent ways of being (e.g., Belenky et al., 1986; Gilligan, 1982). In ironic contrast, a transnational feminist psychology draws upon a cultural-psychological critique to illuminate how these supposedly liberatory forms of expansion-oriented relationality rest on androcentric foundations that undermine efforts at liberation.

### ***Beyond 'Coital and Conjugal': Liberating Relationship Research***

One manifestation of androcentrism in expansion-oriented relationality is the unnecessarily sexualized construction of associated concepts, which reflects a portrayal of relationship as a 'coital and conjugal' space (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994). This androcentric understanding of relationship is evident in the study of attraction, where researchers have increasingly neglected determinants of relational affiliation (e.g., propinquity) for a narrower focus on determinants of mate selection (e.g., physical appearance). Although work in feminist psychology has critiqued mainstream research for its essentialist emphasis on naturalized 'sex' differences in determinants of preference, it nevertheless reproduces the emphasis on mate selection and the corresponding construction of attraction as a coital and conjugal phenomenon. Even though relationship partners (mating and otherwise) have many features that might serve as a basis of attraction and choice, feminist responses to mainstream work tend to share the latter's androcentric focus on (sexually) appealing appearance. Moreover, the androcentric emphasis on pleasant appearance further informs understandings of gender equality. Research notes that gender differences in determinants of mate preference are less evident in more gender-egalitarian societies (Eagly & Wood, 1999), presumably because the increased economic power of women gives them the privilege to attend to pleasant appearance rather than more material concerns. The implication is that one can best serve the cause of social justice by elevating this androcentric, sexualized construction of attraction to the status of a general norm, thereby granting women equal enjoyment of the (male) privilege to prefer and select mates based on considerations of appearance and sexual appeal.

The androcentrism of relationship research is likewise evident in constructions of *love* and *care* that emphasize the high

arousal pleasure, rapturous self-expansion, self-assertive expression, and emotional intimacy of conjugal relationship. Even though one can imagine other constructions of love and care – for example, more socially responsive versions that emphasize the assurance of belongingness and attention to obligations of material support – the androcentrism of relationship research is again evident in the tendency to elevate these sexualized understandings to the status of normative standard for application beyond conjugal relationship. An example is the mainstream emphasis on self-disclosure as a technology for the production of affective intimacy. Although feminist perspectives frequently valorize self-disclosure and emotional intimacy as liberatory manifestations of women's relationality, a transnational feminist psychology draws upon social science research that associates this way of doing relationship with the rise of romantic individualism (emphasizing self-exploration and free expression of authentic, affect-rich relationship; see Oliner, 1998; Stone, 1977). Beyond the association with ontological separation (which we elaborate in the next section) the androcentrism of expansion-oriented relationality is remarkably evident in the primary articulation of the emphasis on self-disclosure and emotional intimacy: social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973). The idea of social penetration provides an apt (and androcentric) metaphor for the process by which inherently separate partners use processes of mutual disclosure and affirmation to build on initial attractions, probe each other's beliefs and desires, and create a sense of intimate common ground (across the intersubjective gap) that will provide a basis for connection in the absence of ecological affordances.

In contrast to the androcentric construction of relationship concepts in coital and conjugal terms, a transnational feminist psychology perspective draws upon the epistemological position of diverse, majority-world settings to propose socially responsible



concepts – associated with maintenance-oriented relationality and the experience of embedded interdependence – that better realize the social justice aims of feminist theory and research. Rather than the androcentric emphasis on social penetration and a construction of care as emotional support or provision of high-arousal pleasure, maintenance-oriented forms of relationality in many majority-world spaces emphasize the materiality of care and an understanding of love as dutiful performance of obligations in the context of enduring connection. Rather than elevate an androcentric conception of attraction to the status of normative standard and grant women equal privilege to select partners and maintain relationships (or not) based on their capacity to provide pleasure, a transnational feminist psychology perspective deconstructs the androcentric standard and proposes more egalitarian ways of being that spread broader assurance of belongingness and support to all people, regardless of social position or possession of attractive qualities.

### ***Beyond the Neoliberal Individualist Growth Paradigm: Sustainable Relationality***

Besides the portrayal of relationship concepts in coital and conjugal terms, a second manifestation of androcentrism is evident in the model of agency that expansion-oriented forms of relationality imply. Drawing upon context-sensitive research from a cultural psychology framework (e.g., Adams et al., 2012), a transnational feminist psychology helps to locate the foundations of expression-oriented relationality in the experience of ontological separation and disjoint agency associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence – in other words, in the same models of person that feminist research has long critiqued as an instance of androcentrism in psychological science (e.g., Belenky et al., 1986; Chodorow, 1978). Despite emphasizing the viability of communal or relational forms of self and agency, mainstream feminist perspectives nevertheless continue to valorize manifestations of

expansion-oriented relationality that are rooted in androcentric assumptions about ontological separation. As both postcolonial and feminist scholars have emphasized, this sense of ontological separation is itself an expression of privilege associated with life circumstances that afford freedom from material constraint. In other words, this sense of disjoint agency is itself a manifestation of domination and injustice, not only because the corresponding sense of freedom from constraint is unavailable to people in less privileged positions (i.e., the vast majority of humanity), but also because the exercise of disjoint agency reflects and reproduces the marginalization of people in less privileged positions (Shaw, 2000). This line of reasoning suggests that conceptions of gender justice that prescribe equal enjoyment of expansion-oriented relationality for women with enough power to do so may have the consequence of reproducing racial, ethnic or class privilege in the name of gender equality.

Rather than reinforce androcentric models that contribute to oppression, a transnational feminist psychology draws on context-sensitive research in a variety of majority-world spaces to reimagine forms of relationality that might serve the interests of liberation. From this perspective, liberatory relationality requires the feminist recognition of embeddedness as a fundamental feature of the human condition and the development of sustainable ways of being and doing that derive from the foundation of embeddedness. Rather than outposts of patriarchal oppression that need intervention, a transnational feminist psychology looks to everyday experience in various majority-world spaces for inspiration about sustainable ways of being, based on the materiality of care and broad assurance of support, that resonate with the experience of embeddedness. In the process, a transnational feminist psychology illuminates manifestations of androcentrism in WEIRD spaces that are typically obscured in mainstream feminist analyses because of the unwitting adoption of ethnocentric or racialized

standards. As such, a transnational feminist psychology strives to contribute to the formulation of viable, more human(e) forms of relationality that can better serve the interests of gender equality and global social justice, without reinforcing neocolonial tropes and practices.

## NOTES

- 1 Our use of 'majority world' resembles postcolonial feminist scholars' use of 'third world' (e.g., Mohanty, 1991): specifically, as recognition of shared treatment as junior sibling or primitive 'other' within globalizing discourses of geopolitical relations, international development, and mainstream social science. Against this background, the phrase 'majority world' adds connotations of prescriptive authority. Although conventional perspectives often portray majority-world settings in terms of deviation from a presumed standard, the use of *majority* emphasizes that these settings constitute the descriptive norm for human experience. At the same time, the term does not imply uniformity or monolithic unity across diverse spaces, and we explicitly disavow notions of West versus the Rest that lump together people from various non-European settings as other to the Western self. In contrast, our research emphasizes the extent to which both 'West' and the majority 'Rest' are constructed categories. More generally, we eschew the prevailing construction of culture in terms of timeless characteristics of bounded entities, and instead propose a more fluid construction of culture as dynamic, flowing patterns (see Adams & Markus, 2004). Within the present chapter, this conception of culture finds expression in our investigations of the dynamics of attraction across cultural ecologies (i.e., urban and rural spaces) within the United States, and the construction of love and support across varieties of cultural practice (e.g., church attendance) within West African settings.
- 2 Although we have appropriated the concepts of *interdependence* and *interdependence* to make contact with other bodies of work in cultural psychology (especially the framework of Markus and Kitayama, 1991), our elaboration of these concepts reflects more particular understandings that arise from multiple years of systematic participant observation and ethnographic-style field research in West African and Turkish settings. It remains unclear whether these particular understandings translate well to other appropriations of the independence–interdependence framework, especially those based on experimental manipulation or gender differences within North American spaces (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997). Indeed, one of our primary points in this chapter is that patterns of relationality typically associated with women's interdependent self appear instead, from a cultural psychology perspective, to resemble patterns associated with independent constructions of

self (and neoliberal individualist subjectivity). In any case, we apply the same caution about understandings of the interdependence–independence framework that we apply to understandings of 'culture' more generally (Adams & Markus, 2004). Rather than monolithic or bounded constructs, independent and interdependent selfways exist in multiple instantiations that vary within and across different cultural ecologies. In the course of everyday activity, a person can engage multiple and conflicting varieties of these selfways, leading to situated individual performances of independence and interdependence that vary considerably across persons and contexts.

- 3 In light of the emphasis on gender differences in recent work on attraction processes (e.g., Bjorklund & Shackelford, 1999), it is noteworthy that gender of participant did not moderate results. The association between pleasant appearance and positive outcomes was equally true of both women and men in the American setting (and equally absent among both women and men in the Ghanaian setting). Although noteworthy, we advocate caution in interpreting these results as lack of evidence for gender differences (i.e., a version of accepting the null hypothesis).
- 4 Although implicit in our previous discussion, it bears emphasis that this voluntaristic construction of relationship and associated implications for relational phenomena are not limited to voluntary relationships. Instead, the conception of relationship as choice informs experience and study of relationship in general, including in the context of such 'environmentally afforded' connections as family (e.g., authoritative parenting style; Baumrind, 1968), or work relationships (e.g., Sanchez-Burks, 2005).

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# Gender Differences in Motivation Shape Social Interaction Patterns, Sexual Relationships, Social Inequality, and Cultural History

Roy F. Baumeister

## INTRODUCTION

Are women better than men? Though such questions have energized and politicized discussions of gender differences, my conclusion is that men and women differ more in their motivations than their capabilities. This chapter will cover work pertinent to gender differences in several prominent motivations.

First, differences in sexual motivation are substantial and important. Men desire sex more frequently, and possibly more strongly, than women. Moreover, female sexuality is more amenable to social, cultural, and situational influences than male sexuality. These differences contribute to cultural practices aimed at controlling sexuality and in mating marketplaces.

Second, although the need to belong is strong in both genders, it takes different forms. Female sociality is highly focused on the intimate pair bond. Male sociality is

divided between intimate pair bonds and broader networks of shallow relationships. This has had enormous historical and political significance. It even provides a basis for understanding the worldwide pattern of gender inequality without having to postulate an innate superiority of one gender or a network of oppressive conspiracies (which have been the two dominant explanations for inequality). It also provides a basis for understanding some personality differences, such as with regard to emotional expressiveness.

Third, a host of motivational differences is based on what I have called the ‘most underappreciated fact’ about gender differences (see Baumeister, 2010), which is that today’s human population is descended from disproportionately more females than males. Evolutionary theory emphasizes that innate traits and tendencies have been selected based on reproductive success, and so the vastly different rates of reproductive success

entailed that men have been subjected to different selection contingencies than women.

## ABILITY OR MOTIVATION?

Gender differences can be a politically charged topic associated with hostility and accusations of bias – in large part because of a heavy focus on ability. The gender similarities hypothesis (Hyde, 2005) has built on evidence that most gender differences are small in size (Aries, 1996), and it has helped to calm some of the antagonistic tone of the discussion, but again it has focused mainly on abilities.

My own work has suggested that motivation rather than ability is the most promising place to find gender differences. Even when men and women have similar capabilities, they may differ as to their preferences, inclinations, and desires. If men and women do different things, it may be more because they like and want different things, rather than that one gender is inferior in ability.

The long-running debate about the relatively low number of female natural scientists and engineers, for example, suggests the utility of switching from ability to motivation. Small differences on tests of mathematical aptitude have been regarded as inadequate to explain the shortage of women scientists. Recent studies have repeatedly found that the dearth of women in science is based largely on female disinclination (Ceci, Williams, & Barnett, 2009; Eccles, 2007). If differential ability were the main cause of gender disparities in science, one would see males and females signing up in equal numbers for elective science courses but the women faring poorly in terms of grades. Instead, the evidence suggests that female students perform well when they take science courses – but they tend not to sign up in the first place. Thus, motivation rather than ability appears to be the main cause.

## SEXUAL MOTIVATION

This section summarizes evidence for two basic differences in sexual motivation. There

may be other motivational differences relevant to sex, but these are important and prominent ones.

### *Strength of Sex Drive*

The sex drive can be defined as the person's desire for sexual activity. Its strength is manifested in two ways: frequency and intensity. The evidence for differential frequency is quite convincing, while the evidence for differential intensity is not.

The question of gender differences in sex drive became politically loaded during the 1970s, when it was apparently assumed that more sexual desire was always better, and feminist scholars sought to deny all implications of female inferiority. However, the assumption that more sexual motivation is better has been largely discredited. Probably neither gender has a precisely optimal amount of desire. In any case, I see no evaluative implications of differential desire.

In order to review the evidence, two colleagues and I started by asking what behavioral or other differences one would expect to observe between two women if one had a stronger sex drive than the other (Baumeister, Catanese, & Vohs, 2001). Then we used that list to search for studies of gender differences in those behaviors. Here, I will outline the major sorts of evidence briefly, but readers looking for a thorough treatment and extensive source citations are referred to that original review.

To begin, men rate their sex drives as stronger than women do. Men report spontaneous sexual arousal more frequently than women. Men think about sex more often than women. Men have more frequent sexual fantasies than women, also with more different partners and with a greater variety of sexual activities (for review, see Leitenberg & Henning, 1995). For example, Ellis and Symons (1990) found that men were four times more likely than women to report having imagined having sex with over a thousand different partners.

Masturbation is a relatively pure measure of sex drive, as it is a means of sexual gratification unconstrained by partners and other

opportunity issues. Men masturbate more than women, indeed substantially more in most studies (Laumann et al., 1994; Oliver & Hyde, 1993). Arafat and Cotton (1974) found that the main reason for not masturbating was a lack of inclination.

Men want sex more often than women. This is true at the start of a new relationship, in the middle of a long marriage, and in late life, as well as in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships. Men initiate sex more than women, while women refuse sex more than men. Men desire more sex partners and actually report having had more sex partners than women, even though this may be logically impossible (which indicates motivated bias in counting). Husbands have more extramarital affairs, with more different partners, than wives.

Men find it harder than women to live without sex. As a strong example, all Catholic clergy take a sacred vow to refrain from all sexual activity (including masturbation) for the rest of their lives, and this vow is linked to their deepest personal convictions, so there is no question of double standard. Yet all evidence suggests that nuns are far more successful than priests at achieving this celibate abstinence (e.g., Murphy, 1992).

In sum, the evidence of stronger sexual motivation in men than in women is overwhelming. We found no measures and no studies yielding evidence of stronger sex drive in women. Men clearly want sex more often than women. They also seem to want it more intensely, though the evidence for difference in intensity is less clear and direct than for frequency (for example, more intrusive, unwanted thoughts about sex, and greater difficulty abstaining from sex).

These results should not be overstated. Nothing implies that women enjoy sex less than men or should not enjoy it. There is also evidence of a minority of women with very high sex drive. Still, on average, men want sex more frequently than women.

### ***Recent Controversy***

To be sure, the view that men and women have equal desires for sex has refused to die.

Recent work by Conley, Moors, Matsick, Ziegler, and Valentine (2011) provided a review citing some new studies that suggest women like sex as much as men, or at least that the difference can be reduced by various methodological innovations. (Their focus on liking for sex was, however, arguably different from ours on desire; the difference has inspired at least the popular quip that women like sex more than they want it, whereas men want it more than they like it.) They cited several studies, such as with speed-dating and undergraduate reports, that found fewer or smaller differences than the bulk of past work. The part of their article that directly addressed our own work on gender differences in sex drive spoke only about frequency of sexual thoughts and ultimately confirmed our conclusion, seeking to dilute it merely by saying that although men think about sex more often than women, men also think about food and sleep more.

A sharp rebuttal by Schmitt and colleagues (2012) pointed out that Conley and colleagues had been highly selective in both citing and interpreting research findings, in some cases drawing conclusions that the original authors they cited had warned against, and generalizing inappropriately. For example, Conley (2011) reported that women reported willingness to have sex with celebrities as much as men, and more than men when corrected for willingness to have sex with a stranger, but this may have been due to using celebrities who were older than the participants: In most sexual pairings, males are older than females. The interest in having sex with a celebrity also may be motivated by more than sex.

Although the view that women's and men's sex drive is equal may appeal to some politically correct and feminist standpoints (both powerful sources of bias in gender research), it does not have much empirical support. Still, we might ask, does recent work call for any revisions in thinking? My sense is that it will be possible to find gender differences in sex drive to be smaller than in the past, especially if one focuses on undergraduate samples in the

present. The young adult years may be a time of peak sexual desire for women in particular. A sample of diaries of sexual activity from a mature sample included many allusions by women to having once had abundant sexual desire but having lost it early in marriage (Arndt, 2009). Moreover, it is quite possible that sexual desires of women have changed historically. Whereas young women of previous generations were brought up to be sexually reticent, they are now much more encouraged to explore sexuality. The shortage of men on college campuses also pushes women to become more sexually active, as that has become increasingly decisive for attracting and retaining a boyfriend (Regnerus, 2011). Most psychologists conduct their debates as if issues such as gender differences in sexual desire must be relatively stable – but as the next section will show, women's sexual desires change substantially according to situational and historical circumstances.

### ***Erotic Plasticity***

Most experts probably agree that a given person's sexual motivations and practices are shaped by both nature and culture, but they disagree severely as to what proportion is natural and what cultural. The constructionist and feminist theories of sexuality that came to prominence in the 1970s emphasized social and cultural influences. Soon thereafter, evolutionary theorizing about sexuality became highly influential, emphasizing biological bases of sexuality.

My own reading of the literature uncovered one factor that almost certainly contributed to the disagreements about what mixture of nature and culture shapes the human sex drive: The answer differs by gender. In brief, male sexuality is more natural, female sexuality more cultural. This can also be phrased in terms of differing degrees of erotic plasticity, which is defined as the degree to which sexual motivation is shaped by social, cultural, and situational factors: Women have higher erotic plasticity than men (Baumeister, 2000).

The evidence for differential erotic plasticity is organized in terms of three broad predictions. The first is that there will be greater variation in motivated sexual activity over the course of a woman's adult life than a man's. There is ample evidence of this. The Kinsey reports found that men's total sexual activity tended to remain stable over time, whereas women's fluctuated much more widely (see Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). With regard to types of sexual activities, a man's sexual preferences tend to remain the same from puberty into old age (merely showing some decline in overall motivation), but women are more likely to add new interests and activities at any age (Adams & Turner, 1985). Many studies have found that lesbians are more likely than gay males to have had heterosexual intercourse (e.g., Kinsey et al., 1953). Bell and Weinberg (1978) found that lesbians exceeded gay men in all categories of heterosexual activity, from sexual dreams, to brief sexual encounters with or without intercourse, to marriage. This again suggests greater plasticity among women.

The second prediction is that specific social and cultural factors will have stronger effects on women than on men. This too is well supported. The National Health and Social Life Survey (NHSLS), widely regarded as the best and most thorough source of data on human sexual activity, found repeatedly that its two main sociocultural variables, education and religion, yielded bigger differences among women than among men (Laumann et al., 1994). That is, more educated women led quite different sex lives from relatively uneducated women in terms of oral sex, anal sex, variety of sexual practices, homosexual experience, and some other variables. The corresponding differences for men were fewer and smaller. Likewise, the most religious and least religious women led quite different sex lives, but for men the differences were typically small and/or nonsignificant. The parallel between religion and education is methodologically useful because in general, high education

was associated with greater sexual activity, whereas high religious involvement was associated with lesser sexual activity.

Thus, the two main sociocultural factors included in that study had opposite effects on sexuality, but both produced bigger differences among women than men. The fact that both variables had a larger impact on women than men thus cannot be explained based on floor or ceiling effects.

Other sociocultural factors likewise generally have been shown to have stronger effects on female than male sexuality. These include peer groups, parental influence and parental divorce, and political ideology.

Last, studies of cultural differences in sexual behavior have generally found wider variations among women than men (Barry & Schlegel, 1984; Christensen & Carpenter, 1962). Indeed, when persons emigrate to a new country, their degree of acculturation may predict changes in their sexual behavior, as they adopt the sexual mores of the new country to replace the values of the culture in which they were brought up. These changes appear to be stronger and more extensive for women than men (Ford & Norris, 1993).

Thus, a wide range of social and cultural variables has been shown to have larger effects on female than on male sexuality. The opposite finding, of greater impact of sociocultural variables on males, has been absent. This broad pattern fits the hypothesis of greater female erotic plasticity.

The third prediction is for low attitude-behavior consistency. To conserve space, I shall simply summarize the conclusion that, in general, women show less consistency between general attitudes and actual behaviors than men, presumably because women's responses and feelings vary more across situations (Baumeister, 2000).

Several additional issues are worth mentioning. Men have higher rates than women of almost all sexual paraphilias – but these do not seem to reflect plasticity *per se*. Indeed, paraphilias are notoriously non-plastic, in the sense that it is difficult even with professional therapy to get rid of unwanted or

problematic patterns of sexual desire. At best, therapists seek to help the (usually male) client to become able to enjoy conventional sexual activities rather than being exclusively focused on the paraphilia.

Another caveat is that the data refer to the sex drive after puberty. A variety of evidence suggests that prepubescent boys may have a phase of erotic plasticity. (This may in fact be where the paraphilias are acquired.) For example, whether one's childhood was urban or rural seems to have a greater effect on sexual orientation among males than females (Laumann et al., 1994). Perhaps most surprisingly, childhood sexual experiences were found to have stronger and more lasting effects on adult sexual dysfunction among males than females (Laumann, Paik, & Rosen, 1999). These patterns suggest that the male sex drive may go through a period of plasticity and learning during childhood, which then comes more or less to an end with puberty, so that the man's sexual tastes are then established and remain largely the same for life. In contrast, female sexuality may continue to evolve and change throughout life.

Overall, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the conclusion that women have higher erotic plasticity than men. The amount of contrary evidence that would be needed to cast doubt on this would be huge. In contrast, the evidence about the reasons for the difference remains murky and shaky. In the original article (Baumeister, 2000), I proposed several speculative hypotheses about possible reasons, including adaptation to superior male strength and power, links to other aspects of sexual scripts, and differential sex drive. Since then, I have come to think that the difference in strength of sex drive is the most likely explanation: Motivations that are inherently milder are more amenable to social and cultural influences than ones that are intensely powerful. The proper test case would involve finding some motivation that is stronger among women than men and then ascertaining whether the male motivation exhibited higher plasticity. The best candidate for that may be the motivation to raise



and nurture children, which most experts believe is stronger among women than men. My impression is that the father role and the father-child bond have been much more variable across cultural and historical differences than the mother role and the mother-child bond, but a careful and systematic review would be desirable. If that is indeed the case, then the difference in erotic plasticity may be part of a more general pattern in motivational theory linking motivational strength to degree of plasticity.

The gender difference in erotic plasticity has a variety of implications. Among them, sexual decision-making and sexual self-knowledge may be more difficult for women than men, because their sexuality continues to change. In contrast, adjustment to new circumstances, including situational and even cultural change, will be easier for women than men, because of their greater flexibility. The most effective sex therapies for men may involve physical interventions (e.g., Viagra), whereas for women insight and other purely psychological interventions may be needed in order to address the meaning of the problems instead of, or along with, their physiological aspects.

The difference in erotic plasticity may help explain some of the acrimony in the overarching debate between social constructionists and evolutionary psychologists about sexual motivation, because there really are different answers. The constructionist school, which is closely associated with feminist theory, has tended to appeal more to women than men, whereas evolutionary psychology has long been a disproportionately male field. Males may be intuitively more comfortable with theories that emphasize the innate and inflexible nature of sexual desire, whereas females may be more drawn to theories that depict sexuality as fluid and changing in response to circumstances.

### ***Sexual Economics***

Economic trade is one of the foundations of human culture and a powerful driver of cultural progress. When two parties each have

something that the other wants, they can both be better off if they make a trade. Could such an analysis apply to sexual behavior? When psychologists have written about sexuality, they have mainly borrowed from two other disciplines: the feminist and constructionist school of thought relied heavily on political science, arguing that sexual choices were driven by political goals and motives; the evolutionary psychology school of thought drew heavily from evolutionary biology, viewing sexual desire as a pattern shaped by nature and selected to promote reproductive success. Taking a different approach, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) invoked economic theory to offer an analysis of the sexual marketplace and the negotiations of exchange that may be central to sexual behavior.

Social psychologists have occasionally borrowed ideas from economics. In particular, social exchange theory has been used to analyze various sorts of interactions. The social exchange approach analyzes the costs and benefits that a given interaction has for each party (e.g., Blau, 1964; Homans, 1950, 1961). Some scholars, most notably Sprecher (1998), have used a social exchange framework to discuss sexual behavior. However, Baumeister and Vohs (2004) proposed that these treatments may have overlooked or downplayed a key feature of the exchange, which is that sexual activity itself is often regarded as something men get from women.

The so-called principle of least interest is an important basis for social exchange. This principle was articulated by Waller and Hill (1951 [1938]) and posits that when two parties contemplate doing something, power and economic advantage (influence) accrue to the one who wants it less. The party with the higher desire has more to lose if the activity does not happen and therefore may be motivated to offer additional inducements. This chapter has already reviewed substantial evidence that women typically desire sex less than men. That gives women an advantage in negotiations about possible sexual activity, because the woman is much more willing

than the man to break off the discussion and refrain from sex. Hence, the man will often find himself in a position of wanting to add inducements to make sex more appealing to the woman.

As a result, female sexuality acquires a kind of value that male sexuality is lacking. Men want sex from women, and male sexuality itself has little or no exchange value. Therefore the man may need to offer the woman other things – such as love, commitment, respect, attention, favors, career advancement, grades, or money – to persuade her to engage in sex.

What might women want from men that sex might gain for them? In pretty much all countries and cultures in the world, men have more wealth, status, and other cultural rewards than women. (Reasons for this will be considered in the latter part of this chapter.) Hence the basis for a marketplace is in place: Men and women do want different things from each other, and both can benefit by making a trade.

Thus, the start of a sexual relationship is likely to be preceded or accompanied by a transfer of resources from the man to the woman. This may take the form of gifts and attention, or of commitment to a long-term relationship (often with financial implications), or at least symbolic indication that the man intends to make such a commitment. Crucially, the price of sexuality – that is, how much the man gives the woman in exchange for sex – will fluctuate according to familiar principles of the economic marketplace. In a nutshell, with sex, women are the supply, and men are the demand. Hence fluctuations in the ratio of supply and demand will influence the price, as well as other factors such as the competitive position of individual women.

Admittedly, sexual economics is a highly unromantic theory about sexual behavior. Such an approach is likely to elicit resistance from many individuals (both experts and laypersons) who may prefer to think of sexuality in other ways. Anecdotally, some researchers have found that the theory fares better in the laboratory when participants are under cognitive load than when they are able to dwell on it consciously (Dahl, Sengupta, & Vohs, 2009). It is

as if people know at some level that it is correct and unconsciously will confirm it, but when they can consciously monitor their responses and find reasons to override that style of thinking, they are tempted to do so.

Regardless of how emotionally or intuitively appealing the theory may be, it provides an effective fit to a large mass of empirical findings, many of which were reviewed by Baumeister and Vohs (2004). Here, I provide just a sampling of that evidence. The core ideas are that the price of sex will vary according to the marketplace, and that there will be a broad asymmetry that reflects the consensual belief that female sexuality has higher exchange value than male sexuality.

Most obviously, prostitution exemplifies the asymmetry. Prostitution has been found in most cultures in some form, but almost invariably it involves men giving women money for sex. The relatively rare male prostitutes also have mainly male customers. Men who wish to earn money by having women pay them for sex will find relatively few opportunities. For example, Atchison, Fraser, and Lowman (1998) reported that a long and determined search to find female customers of prostitution failed to find anything more than a couple of cases of women who had joined a boyfriend and prostitute for a threesome.

Patterns of exchanging sex for other goods likewise reflect the asymmetry in sexual value. Women have exchanged sex for career advancement, grades in college courses, and other goods, but men typically have no chance to do the same. In violent situations, ranging from abusive relationships to gang initiations, women have sometimes been able to give sex in order to escape being beaten, but men in the same situations have not had that option (e.g., DeMaris, 1997; Miller, 1998). Access to celebrities is another revealing pattern. Both men and women fantasize about having sex with celebrities, such as media stars and professional athletes, but in general only women can do this. A non-famous woman can have sex with a celebrity

man precisely because her sexuality has value, and so she can exchange it for some of his time and attention. In contrast, a non-famous man has nothing to offer a celebrity woman in order to get her to have sex with him. The moral implications and subtleties of these differences can be debated, but my point here is merely that the asymmetry confirms that female sexuality has exchange value that male sexuality lacks.

Laws and customs likewise have long recognized the asymmetry in sexual value and even institutionalized it. Laws about statutory rape have mainly punished men (of whatever age) who have sex with girls under the age of consent, whereas women who have sex with boys under the age of consent have rarely been prosecuted and are sometimes explicitly exempt. As Friedman (2002) explained, in American law the practice for a long time entailed that sex between two teenagers was by definition a crime committed by the boy against the girl, even if the girl was completely eager to do it and had initiated the sex. One might object to that finding on methodological grounds by pointing out that nearly all sex laws are enforced mainly at the expense of men, indicating that sex laws are legislated (usually by male-dominated legislatures) to restrict male sexual activity and punish male offenders. An exception, however, is that female marital infidelity has long been stigmatized and punished more severely than male infidelity (e.g., Tannahill, 1980) – which fits the view that a woman who has sex with someone other than her spouse is giving away something of value that belongs to the marriage, unlike an unfaithful husband, whose sexuality is seen as having no value.

Further support for the gender asymmetry was provided in an intensive cross-cultural study by Betzig (1989). Across 186 cultures, she found that it was far more common to treat adultery by the woman than by the man as grounds for divorce (though in many cultures adultery by either was grounds). In contrast, failing to provide material resources qualified as sufficient grounds for divorce mainly when the man rather than woman was

derelict. These two patterns reflect the implicit assumption that marriage is an exchange in which the man contributes money and the woman contributes sex.

Many other practices reflect the asymmetry. In dating, it is typically the man who pays for dates and activities, even when the man and woman are ostensibly equal and earn similar salaries. Sexual coercion occurs by both sexes, but female victims are more traumatized than male ones (e.g., Anderson & Struckman-Johnson, 1998), and laws overwhelmingly prosecute male rather than female offenders (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1998).

Turning to the issue of fluctuations in price, there is abundant evidence that the ratio of supply and demand changes the price of sex. An early, landmark work by Guttentag and Secord (1983) compared many different cultures and found that sexual norms and practices varied according to the sex ratio. The effect does not resemble democracy (majority rule) but rather resembles economic trade (i.e., being in the minority has the advantage). When men outnumber women, sexual norms tend to be restrictive, indicating a relatively high price of sex, which is precisely what happens when demand exceeds supply. Premarital sex and extramarital sex are rare, and a man typically must make a firm and expensive commitment before he can begin having sex. In contrast, when women outnumber men, the price of sex is relatively low, as would befit the case of supply exceeding demand. In such situations (such as after a major war), sexual norms are loose, there are many opportunities for premarital and extramarital sex, and a woman cannot really demand much commitment or fidelity from her partner.

Subsequent work has continued to show that the price of sex fluctuates based on sex ratio, as indicated by things such as fashions (Barber, 1999). A large cross-cultural survey of teen pregnancy rates revealed a pattern that seems paradoxical: The fewer men around, the higher the rate of teen pregnancy (Barber, 2000). Yet that pattern can be understood on the basis of sexual economics. When there are

fewer men, the young women compete more earnestly for them, just as sellers do in a buyer's market. They compete by lowering the effective price, which means offering sex more freely. That boosts the pregnancy rate.

The recent shift in gender composition on American college campuses has tilted the sex ratio. Whereas once men far outnumbered women, now women outnumber men. The result is precisely what sexual economics theory predicts: The oversupply of women relative to male demand has resulted in a lowering of the price of sex, resulting in extensive promiscuity and casual sex (Regnerus, 2011).

Sexual economics offers novel explanations for important phenomena in the history of sexuality. As noted above, many cultures have exerted pressure on women to restrain their sexuality. Cultures need to exert some control over sexuality for a variety of practical reasons, and targeting women may be more effective than men insofar as women have higher erotic plasticity and therefore will respond better than men to cultural influences. Still, research evidence about the agents of cultural influence and their motivations has been quite sparse.

Ironically, a rare example of agreement between the feminist and evolutionary perspectives on sexuality has been the assumption that men have been mainly responsible for the cultural suppression of female sexuality. Put very simply, feminist theory generally sees male oppression as an overarching explanation for nearly all women's problems. Evolutionary theory asserts that men are highly motivated to ensure the paternity of their children and hope to improve their chances of doing so by persuading women to dislike sex.

Despite that agreement, an extensive literature review by Baumeister and Twenge (2002) found that women were almost invariably the proximal sources of influence on women to restrain their sexuality. Where direct male influence on female sexuality was found, it typically pushed for greater sexual activity rather than lesser. But for the most part male influence was absent. Mothers and

female friends, rather than fathers and male friends, were the sources of most influence on women to restrain their sexual desires. This ranged from mild and informal forms of influence, such as telling daughters religious reasons to cultivate sexual virtue and gossiping about the bad reputations of sexually active young women, to severe and harmful practices such as surgical alteration and impairment of a girl's genitals in a way designed to impair sexual response.

Unlike the evolutionary and feminist theories, sexual economics theory predicted such a pattern of female influence (anticipated by Cott, 1978, but reviewed by Baumeister & Twenge, 2002). There are practical reasons for women to restrain each other's sexuality. To do so resembles a common method used by monopolies and cartels to drive up the price of some good or service by restricting the supply. Assuming that male demand is roughly constant in any local marketplace, women can best raise the price of sex by colluding to restrict the supply. Earlier I noted the seemingly puzzling finding by Oliver and Hyde's (1993) meta-analysis that support for the sexual double standard was invariably found to be stronger among women than men, contrary to the feminist assumption that the double standard was part of a male conspiracy to oppress and control women. Instead, the double standard appears to be a somewhat rational adaptation by which women can increase their material benefits that come from exchanging sex for a better life. Women may assert that premarital sex is acceptable for men but less so for women as a way of putting pressure on other women to hold back sexually, so that men will increase the level of commitment and other benefits they will give in order to get sex.

In that connection, the so-called Sexual Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s can be viewed as a market correction. By that point, women had gained considerable increases in their opportunities for educational attainment and lucrative careers. Sex was no longer each woman's crucial ticket to a good life. Insofar as women could provide better lives for themselves, they no longer needed to hold sex as

hostage in order to maximize the price. By the same token, many authors have pointed out that the campaigns against surgical impairment of female genitals have only mixed results among highly disadvantaged groups of women, but once these women find access to education and economic empowerment, these practices quickly cease on their own, consistent with a sexual economics analysis.

A prospective test of this work was conducted by Baumeister and Mendoza (2011). By merging separate databases with international comparisons, they found that the price of sex was lower in countries with a greater degree of gender equality. That is, in countries where men and women approached economic, educational, health, and political equality, people reported more sex partners, were more likely to report having had one-night stands, had commenced sexual activity at earlier ages, and were less inclined to advocate remaining a virgin until marriage (as compared to other countries where women's status was relatively more inferior to men's). Among other implications, this work suggests that if males have sought to increase their sexual opportunities by oppressing women, this strategy was largely self-defeating.

## HOW PEOPLE BELONG

Sex is hardly the only motivational difference between men and women. This section focuses on a motivation that is common to both genders but that is satisfied in somewhat different ways. Specifically, the need to belong is a basic and universal human motivation. It consists of a drive to form and maintain social bonds, defined by regular and non-negative interactions occurring within a framework of ongoing, mutual caring and concern. Abundant evidence indicates that this is a powerful drive that shapes much of human activity, including emotion, cognition, behavior, health, and well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

There is undeniably one tradition that regards men as having less of this motivation

than women. Cross and Madson (1997) compiled an impressive amount of evidence suggesting that women seek connection in ways and circumstances that contrast with men's seeking independence and autonomy, and these findings could be interpreted as reflecting lesser drive for social connection among men. However, much of that literature could also be reinterpreted as indicating simply that men connect in different ways (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997).

Women appear to be more interpersonally motivated and even more social than men if one defines sociality purely in terms of close, intimate, one-to-one relationships. To be sure, that has been the dominant approach in social psychology in recent decades, and so the view of women as more social than men resonates well with prevailing trends in the field. However, if one focuses on larger groups and networks with shallower relationships, then men are if anything more social than women.

The evidence that men orient toward a larger social sphere than women is broad and diverse (reviewed by Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; also Baumeister, 2010). When children have free play time, girls tend to pair off and play with the same partner for an extended time, while boys either play with a series of partners or in larger groups (Benenson, Aposteleris, & Parnass, 1997). Boys have larger social networks than girls (Belle, 1989). Gender differences in helping and aggression – which are prototypes of prosocial and antisocial behavior – are found mainly in the context of larger groups (where men do plenty more than women of both helping and aggression). In intimate relationships, men and women behave quite similarly. The implication is that both men and women care about what happens in close relationships, but women are less interested in the larger social network, so they neither help nor aggress all that much.

Experimental tests of these competing theories about the gender difference in social motivation were conducted by Gabriel and Gardner (1999). They measured the social



orientations in multiple ways. There was little or no evidence of women being more social or more interdependent than men overall. However, men's sociality was more oriented toward large groups than women's. For example, in spontaneous self-descriptions, men and women mentioned social ties at about the same rate, but women's self-descriptions were heavily oriented toward one-to-one relationships whereas men included memberships in groups and organizations as well as pair bonds. When people were instructed to recall a single event from their lives marked by strong positive or negative emotion, women talked about intimate relationship events, whereas men were more likely to mention events involving groups or organizations. Solitary events (e.g., getting a good grade on a test) were a small minority for both genders. Perhaps most relevant, when people imagined making a choice between doing what was best for the self and doing what was best for others, men and women made somewhat different choices depending on who the 'others' were. If the other was a close friend, both genders, but women more than men, tended to say they would sacrifice their own self-interest and do what was best for the friend. In contrast, if the other was a group, both genders were more inclined to put themselves first, but women did that more than men. In other words, women were more likely than men to sacrifice themselves for a close relationship partner, but men were more likely than women to say they would sacrifice themselves for the good of the group.

Nor are these patterns isolated or limited to arcane laboratory procedures. If you make a list of activities that depend on large groups or broad networks, you will have a list of activities that appeal to men more than women: team sports, large organizations, economic systems, as well as fields of work that depend on contributions from large numbers of people contributing and building on each other's work, such as science and technology. It is not easy to think of any large group activities that appeal to women more than men.

### ***Implications for Personality***

If men and women are social in somewhat different ways, one would expect there to be some personality differences that reflect these preferred styles of relating. Space limitations preclude any detailed discussion here (see Baumeister, 2010), but I can illustrate. Emotional expressiveness, for example, is useful for building intimate relationships, but in large groups (when one may have rivals and enemies), as well as in economic negotiations, revealing one's feelings too readily may be costly. Assertiveness may be disruptive in an intimate pair but may be necessary to get ahead in a large group. From the present analysis, I predict that male stereotypic traits may be oriented toward broader groups, whereas female stereotypic traits will be better suited to close relationships.

### ***Implications for Gender Relations and Culture***

One of the great and perennial challenges for theory of gender differences has been to explain inequality. All over the world, in essentially all known cultures, men have higher status than women. Whether status is measured in terms of political power, wealth and money, influence, education and knowledge, prestige, or other factors, men tend to outrank women. Why?

Two main explanations have reigned. Up until the middle of the 20th century it was widely assumed (indeed by both genders) that men were innately superior. The very idea of sending women to universities was resisted for a time because it was thought women could not perform effectively in such settings and/or would be emotionally if not physically damaged by such unnatural activities. Similar arguments were made about working in prestigious, demanding careers, such as physicians and business executives. Today, of course, very few people continue to believe this; women have moved into all sorts of occupations and performed well.

The second explanation, which was advanced with increasing stridency over the

decades of the 20th century, is that men conspired to oppress women and keep them down. Once the relative underachievement of women throughout history could no longer be attributed to innate inferiority, the main option for explaining it was that women had been victimized by men and unfairly prevented from reaching their potential. This argument of evil male conspiracy is central to the feminist worldview and has become the default explanation.

My own efforts have been to develop a less antagonistic account of gender relations and to understand them on the basis of motivational rather than ability differences. The notion that men conspire together against women is typical of a victim fantasy (see Baumeister, 1997) but has very little evidence to support it. Hence, let me offer an alternative hypothesis (from Baumeister, 2010).

Most accounts of gender politics note that men and women were close to equal partners in hunter-gatherer societies. Gender inequality increased with agriculture and has remained substantial ever since, diminishing only recently in highly modern societies. The feminist account was that it was the result of the men pushing the women down. In contrast, I wish to suggest that the men did not push the women down – indeed the women did not drop at all, but merely rose at a slower pace than the men.

Progress is a central advantage of culture. In nature, progress depends on genetic change, which is extremely slow. In culture, progress is much faster. Culture achieves this by having people work together in groups, where they pool their knowledge, divide tasks so as to promote individually specialized expertise, and increase mutual wealth via economic trade. Crucially, all of these succeed much better and faster in large groups than in small ones. The more people there are who contribute new information, the faster the pool of information increases. The larger the economic network, the greater the benefits of trade.

Ultimately, therefore, culture arose mainly in the male social sphere rather than the

female sphere. This is not because of any superiority in male abilities. Nor is it because the evil men banded together to conspire to oppress women. It occurred simply because the male social orientation favored large networks of shallow relationships, which are optimal for culture. The female preference for close, intimate pair bonds was not a fertile ground for cultural systems to develop.

My suggestion, therefore, is that the history of cultural progress was not a matter of men conspiring against women. Rather, groups of men worked against other groups of men, with each group vitally supported by their women. The male groups competed in exploration, in battle, in technological innovation, in business and trade, and in other spheres. Many feminists may see men as the enemy, but men in general do not regard women as the enemy (nor, I suspect, do the majority of non-feminist women regard men as enemies). Instead, throughout much of history, men's rivals and enemies have been other men, and those competitions and antagonisms have driven cultural progress.

Because culture grew out of the men's sphere, its rewards – wealth, knowledge, and power – were mainly created there. That is why (some) men ended up controlling the lion's share of wealth, knowledge, and power. Women were left outside asking to be permitted to share.

My account of cultural progress provides a potential context for the earlier discussion of sexual economics. I noted earlier that the gender difference in sex drive has long given women a bargaining advantage when it comes to sex, because in effect women have something men want. But trade typically requires that both parties have something the other wants. The male contribution to cultural progress produced the result of men having plenty that women wanted, such as wealth, knowledge, and power. Hence for much of history, gender relations revolved around women using their sexuality (typically through marriage but sometimes in other contexts) to obtain access to the cultural rewards controlled by men.

## THE MOST UNDERAPPRECIATED FACT

Before closing, I wish to highlight one other basis for motivational differences between men and women. Several years ago DNA researchers concluded that today's human population is descended from about twice as many women as men (e.g., Shriver 2005; Wilder, Kingon, Mobasher, Pilkington, & Hammer, 2004; Wilder, Mobasher, & Hammer, 2004). When published, it attracted a brief flurry of media attention but then was soon forgotten as a curiosity. However, I consider it the single most underappreciated fact about gender differences (see Baumeister, 2010).

Any innate differences between men and women were presumably instilled by evolution and natural selection, which is driven by reproductive success. Whatever traits fared best at producing offspring tended to spread through the gene pool. But men and women have faced very different reproductive odds and contingencies throughout evolution. Indeed, the relatively high rate of non-reproduction among males is found in other species as well, and probably is even more extreme among them than among humans. Although laypersons have often expressed surprise at hearing that women outnumber men two to one among humankind's ancestors, thinking it would be closer to equality, experts have tended to be surprised for the opposite reason – they thought the imbalance would be even larger than it is (again, as is often found in other species).

What has reduced the gap has been the spread of monogamy through the civilized world during the last couple of centuries. This is often depicted as a benefit to women, but it is difficult to see how enforced monogamy actually benefits women. It reduces their options. Indeed, even a woman who wants monogamy would be better off in a polygamous society, because there will be an oversupply of single men. Almost certainly, monogamy was institutionalized in order to ensure that almost every man could have a mate.

To say that women outnumbered men by two to one among humankind's ancestors

implies that the majority of women who ever lived – but only a minority of men – have a descendant alive today. It was the norm for women to reproduce, and therefore few special traits were needed. Instead, selection pressures on women could focus on the quality of offspring, based on finding a good mate and providing maximal care once the children were born.

For men, however, the odds were unfavorable. Most men who ever lived were biological dead-ends. Today's humankind is descended only from the minority of men who managed to beat the odds. Hence, the traits that enabled them to succeed where most men failed were the ones that were passed on. Competitive ambition and willingness to take risks would likely be high on that list. Aggressiveness may also be relevant. (In many other mammals, competitive aggression is how males decide who ascends to the alpha-male status, which leads to high reproductive success.)

## CONCLUSION

The theme of this chapter has been to argue that gender differences in motivation are real and important – arguably much more substantial and important than gender differences in abilities. Men and women differ in the strength and plasticity of sexual desire, in the type and number of social bonds they seek, and in a host of traits (competitive ambition, risk taking, materialism) stemming from the difference in reproductive odds.

Indeed, the skewed distribution of reproductive success among men has multiple possible implications that future work may explore. Fewer men than women became parents, but because each baby has one mother and one father, fathers have on average had more children than mothers. Thus, if one takes a crassly biological view of life in which reproduction is the goal, men have outnumbered women both among the losers and among the big winners. For both groups of men, their reproductive outcome was not

primarily dependent on motivation to nurture children but on competition against other men for wealth and status, which have often been keys to attracting women and often even prerequisites for socially sanctioned reproduction. The theory of sexual economics (and much evidence for it) depicts marriage as a bargain in which the man contributes wealth and status while the woman contributes sex.

The pattern of greater male variability is beyond the scope of this chapter, deserving a full treatment elsewhere. Indeed, even with abilities, there is some argument that the gender difference in variability is bigger than the gender difference in average ability. For example, with intelligence, the mean level in adult men is very close to that of adult women, but males are more variable, with disproportionately more males at both extremes of genius and mental retardation (e.g., Jensen, 1998). With regard to motivation, it would be instructive to ascertain whether males are likewise more variable than women. To be sure, throughout history, men have been active in a wider range of activities than women. Once these patterns were established, they became somewhat self-perpetuating, and women were sometimes formally or informally excluded from male activities, but the question remains why those differences became so widespread in the first place. The fact that males established the activities in the first place is in my view underappreciated by theorists who seek to explain all gender disparities on the basis of male oppression. Thus, the women's movement has been largely characterized by demands to be given access to structures created by men rather than by demanding that the women create such structures themselves. In any case, one possible hypothesis for future work to explore is whether a diversity of motivation among men stems in part from the relatively low rate of reproductive success. Whereas most women could and did reproduce, most men could not and did not, so that alternative involvements would have to take the place

of raising children. Such a pattern would, however, have to rely mainly on cultural transmission, because men who did not reproduce would not pass their genes on, by definition.

This understanding of motivational differences helps explain the many ways in which cultures use men and women differently; for example, most cultures treat women as relatively precious while men are relatively expendable (see Baumeister, 2010, for extended discussion). This is both linked to the fact that a culture's population depends on its women more than its men, especially since many men fail to reproduce at all, and is also related to the different forms of sociality: in the intimate relationships favored by women, each person is irreplaceable, but in the larger social units created by men, everyone can be (and in most cases eventually will be) replaced. Likewise, whereas a girl automatically becomes a woman when she grows up, manhood often must be earned via achievements that the culture values (see Bosson, Vandello, & Caswell, Chapter 8 this volume; Gilmore, 1990; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008).

Ultimately, focusing on motivational differences rather than ability differences shows the way to understanding men and women less as antagonistic rivals (or as oppressors and victims) and instead more as complementary partners who make different but vital contributions to the success of their social groups and, ultimately, of the human species.

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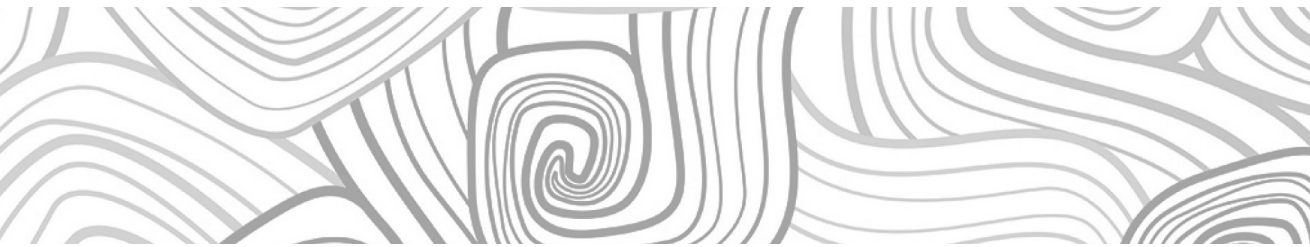


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PART IV

# Conflict and Coping





# Sexism in Contemporary Societies: How it is Expressed, Perceived, Confirmed, and Resisted

Manuela Barreto and Naomi Ellemers

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on outlining the various forms that sexism towards women takes in contemporary societies. We start by describing what sexism is (and what it is not), and go on to review research documenting the varied and relatively subtle forms that sexism can take. We then summarize research identifying the circumstances under which women are likely to perceive themselves and their group as targets of sexism, the effects this has on women, and how women cope with sexism. In doing so, we examine both the conditions under which women unwittingly confirm the stereotypes that target them and when they are able to resist sexism and strive for greater gender equality. We conclude by considering the implications of these insights for anti-discrimination policies and legislation.

## SEXISM IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES

### *Defining Sexism*

Swim and Hyers (2009, p. 407) define sexism as ‘individuals’ attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and organizational, institutional, and cultural practices that either reflect negative evaluations of individuals based on their gender or support unequal status of women and men’. This definition makes clear that sexism is not restricted to individual sources, but can also be embedded in institutional practices. Importantly, it clarifies that sexism can reflect a negative attitude, but it does not need to do so, if it otherwise creates or promotes gender inequality (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Jackman, 1994). Important too is the idea that classifying an attitude or behavior as sexist is not accompanied by assumptions about intentionality on the part of the perpetrator, despite the



fact that lay observers often assume that without intention, behavior that puts women at a disadvantage cannot be classified as sexist (Swim, Scott, Sechrist, Campbell, & Stangor, 2003; see also Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008). In fact, social psychological evidence shows that someone can hold sexist attitudes, or even behave in a sexist manner, in the absence of any intention to do so, and even outside of their conscious awareness (Banaji & Greenwald, 1994). Egalitarian beliefs are often independent of, and compatible with, prejudiced beliefs (Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995). Moreover, to be classified as sexist, incidents do not need to produce clear or direct harm in their targets. Indeed, many of the sexist incidents that target women in contemporary societies are not full-blown or obvious episodes of sexism, but micro-aggressions, or what has also been designated as 'everyday experiences' (Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Each single event is almost unimportant and may seem quite harmless, but when these events accumulate every day, so do their negative effects.

## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SEXISM RESEARCH**

### ***Gender Stereotypes: Descriptive and Prescriptive***

Initially, research on gender stereotypes was predominately descriptive. Across national contexts, while women were typically described as warm, men were typically described as competent (e.g., Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Williams & Best, 1990). Gender stereotypes were recognized as encompassing more than the attributes that men and women are believed to possess, and also included beliefs about what men and women find important, what their preferences are regarding work and family, what their physical appearance tends to be like, and how they express their emotions (Twenge, 1999).

By the 1990s it was acknowledged that gender stereotypes are not merely descriptive, but also prescriptive (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991), although the implications of this distinction have only been studied more recently (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001; Rudman & Glick, 1999, 2001). Descriptive gender stereotypes define how men and women are generally believed to be, while prescriptive stereotypes define how they ought, or ought not, to be. For example, gender stereotypes of warmth and competence describe women as generally warm and men as generally competent, but they also prescribe warmth to women and competence to men.

The discriminatory implications of prescriptive stereotypes are evident for women who behave counter-stereotypically. Stereotypical prescriptions constitute social norms to which men and women are expected to adhere. Competent women run counter to the stereotype and thus become vulnerable to social sanctions. This effect, designated as a 'backlash towards agentic women', has been documented in a variety of contexts, and has been shown to (a) diminish women's chances of being hired, (b) lead to negative impressions of women who enter salary negotiations, and (c) determine negative evaluations of women's performance in leadership positions, adversely affecting their chances for promotion (see Rudman & Phelan, 2008, for a review). Penalties for violating gender prescriptive norms not only affect how women are evaluated, but also their ability to influence others (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995). Women suffer adverse effects when they display behaviors that are deemed necessary to succeed in particular occupations or high status positions, while the same behaviors are rewarded when displayed by men.

This recent understanding of the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of gender stereotypes is important because it clarifies the different mechanisms through which women can be harmed by stereotypes. The consideration of descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes is also important because it helps explain why gender stereotypes

persist in the face of an increased representation of women in agentic roles (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Spence & Buckner, 2000). Indeed, while research shows that exposure to counter-stereotypical exemplars helps combat stereotyping (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990), this mainly affects the descriptive aspect – and more often than not they are merely seen as exceptions to the rule, represented as specific sub-types such as ‘the career woman’ –294 but does not alter prescriptive beliefs about how women ought to be (Gill, 2004; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Stereotypic prescriptions are thus fundamental mechanisms through which gender stereotypes are maintained and are resilient to changes in social roles.

### ***Sexist Attitudes: Variety in Expression***

In the 1980s and 1990s traditional measures seemed to show reductions in sexism, but many have pointed out that rather than a reduction in sexist beliefs, this reflected a change in their expression. As egalitarian values developed in many contemporary Western societies, overt expressions of sexism became socially undesirable and in some cases even illegal. People holding sexist attitudes became unlikely to express their views as openly as traditional sexism scales required but such attitudes could be evidenced by more subtle indicators (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995). Thus, it became necessary to uncover other ways through which sexism is expressed in contemporary societies and to develop measures and procedures that could tap into these more subtle beliefs.

The Modern Sexism scale, developed by Swim, Aikin, Hall, and Hunter (1995) focuses on the denial of continuing gender discrimination and the related antipathy about women’s demands for equality. Modern sexists are not necessarily looking for ways to express their sexism covertly. Rather, they are often simply unaware of the various expressions that sexism can take and therefore do not recognize its persistence and

prevalence (Swim & Cohen, 1997; Swim, Mallet, & Stangor, 2004). Around the same time, the Neosexism scale was developed independently by Tougas, Brown, Beaton, and Joly (1995). Neosexism is defined as the ‘manifestation of a conflict between egalitarian values and residual negative feelings towards women’ (Tougas et al., 1995, p. 843). The focus of this scale is on the support for public policies designed to address women’s disadvantage, such as affirmative action. Neosexists’ lack of support for this group-based treatment is consistent with a dominant cultural focus on individual merit in Western societies.

Despite their innocuous appearance, the beliefs assessed by these scales can support gender inequalities and promote the status quo. Indeed, modern sexist beliefs are related to old-fashioned sexism (Tougas et al., 1995), weaker endorsement of egalitarianism, lower support of feminism (Campbell, Schellenberg, & Senn, 1997), and the use of sexist language (Swim & Hyers, 2009). In addition, modern or neosexist attitudes are more predictive of other gender-related attitudes than are attitudes assessed by old-fashioned sexism scales (e.g., Tougas et al., 1995).

Another important development in the study of sexism was the specification of sexism as an ambivalent attitude (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Here, sexism can be hostile when it is expressed as clear antipathy towards women, but it can also be ‘benevolent’, if it is expressed in a subjectively positive manner. Benevolent sexism can be manifested in several ways, such as by introducing restrictions on women’s activities in order to protect them (Moya, Glick, Expósito, de Lemus, & Hart, 2007) or by paternalistic forms of help (Becker, Glick, Ilic, & Bohner, 2011). Such behaviors are enveloped in a positive layer of protection and flattery, but they also subtly convey the belief in women’s inferior abilities to defend themselves, help themselves, or deserve rewards. The positive tone of benevolent sexism is thus only superficial. Benevolent sexism is positively related to hostile sexism, leading to a combination that

forms what Glick and Fiske (1996) designate as ambivalent sexism. Benevolent sexism is also reliably and positively correlated with United Nations indicators of gender inequality (Glick et al., 2000), and to a range of negative attitudes towards women, such as blaming rape victims (Viki, Abrams, & Masser, 2004) and victims of domestic violence (Glick, Sakalli-Ugurlu, Ferreira, & Souza, 2002).

Besides developing scales to assess sexist attitudes in a more complete way, researchers have also unveiled how sexism can be perpetuated through subtle features of language use (Swim et al., 2004). For example, research on the linguistic framing of gender differences reveals that men's behavior is usually described as the norm and women's as the deviance to be explained (see Hegarty et al., Chapter 3 this volume). This increases gender stereotyping and makes gender status differences appear more legitimate (e.g., Bruckmüller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012). Sexism also tends to be seen as more acceptable if it is accompanied by humorous language, as people apparently assume that jokes cannot harm others – when in fact they do (Ford & Ferguson, 2004).

In sum, an important development in social psychological knowledge regarding sexism entailed the realization that sexism is a multi-faceted concept with diverse forms of expression that are not always obvious to those who express them. We now turn to the consequences this might have for how sexism is experienced by women in contemporary societies.

## **HOW SEXISM IS EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN**

### ***When Do Women Detect They Are Targets of Sexism?***

Perceiving discriminatory treatment is an essential step to address social inequalities. In the case of sexism, perceptions of gender discrimination are robustly and consistently

associated with feminist activism (Cowan, Mestlin, & Masek, 1992). However, women do not always detect that they are targets of sexism, personally or as a group.

One reason why women may fail to detect sexism is because people tend to have a rather simplistic idea of what sexism is or how it is expressed, and they are unaware that sexism can take various forms. People have mental prototypes of prejudiced events (Inman & Baron, 1996). The prototype of a sexist event involves explicit hostility towards women, usually expressed by a male source, with a certain amount of intention and some obvious harm to the target (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991). Sexist events that do not conform to this prototype tend to remain unidentified as sexist. As a result, both modern sexism and benevolent sexism are perceived as less sexist than old-fashioned and hostile sexism (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005b; Swim, Mallet, Russo-Devosa, & Stangor, 2005), and the positive tone in which these beliefs are expressed makes their sources appear quite likable (Killianski & Rudman, 1998).

Sexist humor is also hard to detect as sexism because it deviates from the prototype of sexist expressions and is seen as emotionally positive (i.e., intended to make people laugh), which makes it seem harmless (LaFrance & Woodzicka, 1998). Sexual harassment too does not conform to the prototype of a sexist event because it places women in the role of a desirable sexual partner, which tends to be seen as flattering rather than hostile (Fitzgerald, Swann, & Fischer, 1995). Sexism is also harder to detect when its source is atypical, such as when sexism is voiced by other women instead of by men (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, 2005b) or when it is voiced by powerless rather than powerful sources (Barreto, Ellemers, & Fiske, 2010).

Because so many sexist occurrences deviate from the prototypical, women and men alike do not necessarily realize the pervasiveness of sexism. Indeed, if women are asked how frequently they are exposed to sexism, their estimates are rather low. However, if women are asked about the frequency with

which they have experienced specific events that researchers have identified as sexist, these estimates are considerably higher (Swim et al., 1998; Swim et al., 2001). Women who themselves harbor sexist beliefs are also less likely to recognize particular behaviors as sexist (Cameron, 2001; Swim et al., 2004), whereas when women are highly conscious that sexism can be expected in a variety of contexts, they are more vigilant toward cues that communicate discriminatory treatment (Kaiser, Vick, & Major, 2006; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002).

Another reason why it may be difficult to detect sexism is that the information necessary to do so is often not available, or it is presented case by case, making it hard to discern systematic bias. For example, to conclude that gender discrimination has occurred in the workplace, people usually need to know how men and women performed, as well as the outcomes received by them. In addition, sexism is more likely to be inferred if the information is presented separately for men and for women, as this facilitates between-gender comparisons (Crosby, Clayton, Alksnis, & Hemker, 1986; Rutte, Diekmann, Polzer, Crosby, & Messick, 1994).

Even though information concerning personnel recruitment and promotion is often confidential, in principle people can take steps to acquire enough information to ascertain whether or not gender discrimination has taken place. However, they have to be motivated to search actively for such information. Our research shows that women are more likely to be motivated to search for information about what might have caused a negative outcome if they perceive the domain in which they received that outcome as self-relevant (Stroebe, Barreto, & Ellemers, 2010). Otherwise, information search is reduced and detection of discriminatory treatment is impaired.

Contextual cues may also help women recognize that they have been targets of sexism. Women are more likely to recognize that they experienced sexism if other women suggest this might be the case (Adams, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, & Steele, 2006). However,

this recognition comes at a cost, as it also introduces a generalized social identity threat that elicits negative affect and poor performance. Personal experiences of individual women can also affect the extent to which they perceive that women as a group may be targets of sexism. Women are more likely to recognize sexist treatment after having personally experienced sexist treatment in a biased selection procedure (Stroebe, Ellemers, Barreto, & Mummendey, 2010). Women who were not personally disadvantaged were less motivated to search for information about the results of the selection procedure or to consider the outcomes of other women, and were thus also less likely to uncover the gender-based treatment their group had received. These data suggest that personal experiences seem to carry a special weight when making inferences about whether or not discrimination has taken place.

Although contemporary forms of sexism are hard to detect, there are circumstances under which women are able to recognize the occurrence of sexism. Importantly, empirical data indicate that women do not tend to over-attribute their negative outcomes to gender discrimination – despite popular beliefs that this is the case. Indeed, in the absence of clear information suggesting group-based treatment, or as long as they do not personally suffer the adverse effects of sexist beliefs, women appear rather reluctant to make such attributions (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b). We now discuss the further implications of (not) detecting discriminatory treatment for women's well-being, motivation, aspirations, and task performance.

### ***The Effect of Sexism on Women's Well-Being***

Research in this area has focused on identifying some of the factors that modify the effects of sexism on its targets. Evidence shows that awareness of prejudice and discrimination against one's group is accompanied by negative effects on well-being, such

as low self-esteem, negative affect, and physical and psychiatric symptoms (see Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; and Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002b, for reviews). In a study among women, we found that the more evidence female participants saw of gender discrimination in a selection procedure in which they had just taken part, the more they reported negative affect and low collective self-esteem (Stroebe, Barreto et al., 2010). These negative effects have been explained by arguing that prejudice communicates devaluation by others of an important part of one's identity, that is, one's social identity. Perceiving oneself as a target of prejudice is indeed associated with feelings of social exclusion (e.g., Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001; Schmitt, Spears, & Branscombe, 2003) which lead to negative expectations about future interactions, not only with the particular source of prejudice but also with other members of the outgroup (e.g., Tropp, 2003).

There are conditions, however, under which perceiving prejudice against one's group can result in positive affect. Specifically, in individual performance contexts where the salient alternative is to blame oneself for a negative outcome, members of socially stigmatized groups can protect their self-esteem by attributing a negative outcome to prejudice or discrimination of the evaluator instead of their personal inadequacy (Major, Kaiser, & McCoy, 2003). However, people generally are reluctant to make such attributions. Furthermore, attributing a negative outcome to prejudice is only self-protective when prejudice is perceived as rare – not when it is perceived as pervasive (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002a). As a result, attributing a negative outcome to discrimination seems self-protective for individuals who belong to social groups that are not usually targets of prejudice – for example, men (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002a). By contrast, discrimination attributions are more harmful for individuals for whom this is a pervasive or recurring event, such as women (Schmitt, Branscombe,

Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002). For example, when women read that gender discrimination was rare, attributing a negative outcome to discrimination protected their self-esteem, but this was not the case for women who read that gender discrimination was pervasive (Schmitt, Branscombe, & Postmes, 2003; Stroebe, Dovidio, Barreto, Ellemers, & John, 2010). Thus, to understand the effects of discrimination on individual well-being, it is important to consider not only whether their past experiences make people perceive themselves as targets of discrimination, but also what this means to them in terms of anticipated future treatment.

Another reason why pervasive discrimination is psychologically damaging is because it threatens beliefs in a just world. Just-world theory proposes that the perception of the world as just, plays a fundamental role in human motivation (Lerner & Miller, 1978). Perceiving prejudice as pervasive undermines well-being partly because it implies that everyone does not receive equal or fair treatment. Indeed, we have found that perceiving pervasive discrimination was negatively related to well-being, but that this was not the case when participants had first affirmed their belief in the world as a just place (Stroebe, Dovidio et al., 2010).

Pervasive sexism also undermines well-being because it is expected to affect one's future outcomes negatively. When women perceive others as sexist but do not expect this to influence their personal outcomes, they are less negatively affected. We examined this in a series of studies that disentangled the effects of perceiving oneself or women as a group to be targets of discrimination (Stroebe et al., 2009). By itself, perceiving women as targets of discrimination did not elicit negative affect in female participants. Negative affect was only experienced when women perceived themselves to be a target personally. When discrimination is perceived as rare, women can easily maintain the illusion that they are invulnerable to sexism. However, when discrimination is perceived as pervasive, they are less likely to be able to maintain this illusion.



Research examining how sexism affects its targets often focuses on self-reported well-being. Such self-reports are obtained either retrospectively or on the basis of daily diary reports. As a consequence, such studies focus only on the impact of experiences that women themselves detect and label as sexist. But this does not necessarily capture the full impact of the range of sexist experiences women are likely to encounter because women do not have to recognize sexism to experience its negative effects. Indeed, the very failure to recognize that adverse personal outcomes result from sexist treatment may contribute to the conviction that unfavorable outcomes must be due to some personal inadequacy. We examined this notion in a series of studies, where we compared the effects of subtle (and unrecognized) sexism to the effects of blatant (and recognized) sexism on women's well-being. These studies consistently revealed that both subtle and blatant sexism have negative effects on well-being, but each has its own characteristic effects. For example, women exposed to modern (relatively subtle) sexism expressed more negative self-directed emotions and greater social insecurity than women exposed to a more blatant form of sexism (old-fashioned sexism; Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a). By contrast, women exposed to old-fashioned (blatant) sexism reported more negative other-directed emotions (such as other-directed hostility) than participants exposed to subtle gender discrimination. In this way, subtle gender discrimination promotes a focus on personal shortcomings, whereas people's attention and emotional reactions are directed towards the source of ill treatment when the source blatantly discriminated against them.

If the negative self-directed effects of subtle sexism emerge because they direct attention to inadequacies of the personal self then they should be exacerbated to the extent that the personal self is more vulnerable. We examined this possibility in a series of studies in which women's personal self-esteem and their exposure to subtle versus blatant sexism were orthogonally manipulated (Cihangir, Barreto,

& Ellemers, 2010). In line with our expectations, we found that although *perceptions* of discriminatory treatment did not vary as a function of women's personal self-esteem, personal self-esteem did alter the *impact* of subtle gender discrimination on the negative self-directed emotions they reported (e.g., self-anger, disappointment with the self). As a result, being able to attribute a negative outcome to (blatant) discrimination was mainly beneficial for the well-being of women with low self-esteem (who had lower self-esteem when exposed to subtle rather than blatant sexism), while these attributions were less important for those with high self-esteem (who had similar levels of self-esteem in response to both subtle and blatant sexism).

While some individuals may be motivated to challenge sexist beliefs, others may feel particularly threatened by them. Such different approaches to sexist events can fundamentally alter how they are experienced. We examined this directly in a study in which we manipulated how a group of men expressed sexism: as ingroup favoritism ('you need to be a man to have what it takes') or as outgroup derogation ('women do not have what it takes'; Cihangir, Scheepers, Barreto, & Ellemers, 2013). We reasoned that expressing exclusion in terms of ingroup favoritism sets the standard as male, which could challenge women to attempt to prove that they too could meet this standard. Indeed, this is what we found: women exposed to outgroup derogation exhibited cardiovascular response patterns associated with the experience of (negative) threat, but women exposed to ingroup favoritism instead displayed cardiovascular responses indicative of (positive) challenge.

### **Confirming versus Resisting Sexism**

Past research has shown that sexism has important and concrete implications for how women define and pursue their goals. While in some situations women behave in ways that confirm gender stereotypes, at other times women resist such stereotypes more actively,

either by individually disconfirming them or by collectively protesting against them.

### *Motivation, Aspirations, and Task Performance*

Women who themselves endorse gender stereotypes tend to behave in ways that confirm them. For example, Rudman and Heppen (2003) found that women who implicitly endorsed benevolent sexist beliefs expressed less interest in personal power, indicated lower educational goals and less interest in prestigious occupations, expected less future income, and were less likely to offer to lead a team in a subsequent study. Although these choices might make sense for the women who endorse them, they also perpetuate traditional gender roles, contribute to professional gender segregation, and serve to reinforce descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Women can also confirm gender stereotypes, even if they do not harbor sexist beliefs. Women exposed to sexist beliefs held by others also express lower interest in stereotypically male domains and lower motivation to take on leadership responsibilities (Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga, & Moya, 2010). Women's motivation can also be adversely affected by contextual cues, such as the use of gender-exclusive language in task or job descriptions (e.g., 'we usually know a good employee when we see *him*'; Stout & Dasgupta, 2011) or the underrepresentation of women in particular environments (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2006).

When members of stereotyped groups enter domains in which they are stereotypically expected to be inferior, they feel threatened by the possibility of confirming the stereotype (see Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002 for a review; see also Betz et al., Chapter 26 this volume). This threat, in turn, often impairs their performance, thereby confirming the stereotype. For example, women who took a test that they believed would diagnose their mathematics ability underperformed relative to men, while this did not happen when they did not believe the test was diagnostic of ability

(Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999). Ironically, this type of performance impairment is particularly likely among individuals who strongly identify with, and are skilled in, the targeted domain (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998). Moreover, the fear of confirming the negative stereotype can also have the longer-term effect of leading women to disidentify with, and lower their aspirations in, the domain in which they are stereotypically expected to be inferior, as a self-protective strategy (Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardtstein, 2002). Group members can also distance themselves only from those aspects of the ingroup stereotype that are devalued, while maintaining a strong identification with the more valued characteristics of the ingroup and with the ingroup as a whole (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004).

Research on behavioral confirmation shows that people can also disconfirm expectations when these are clearly expressed (see Klein & Snyder, 2003, for a review). Women are more likely to confirm gender stereotypes when such stereotypes are made salient in a subtle or implicit manner, but are less likely to do so when stereotypes are explicitly expressed. Indeed, research on stereotype threat and its detrimental effects on motivation, aspirations, and task performance tends to use fairly subtle manipulations of the salience of gender stereotypes. Kray, Thompson, and Galinsky (2001) examined stereotype confirmation in a negotiation setting and found that women only tended to confirm stereotype-based expectations (by underperforming on a negotiation task) when the gender stereotype was implicitly activated, but not when it was explicitly activated (see also Bowles, Chapter 28 this volume).

We also found that subtle exposure to benevolent sexism led women to describe their interests in more gender stereotypical ways compared to exposure to hostile or blatant sexism (Barreto, Ellemers, Piebinga, & Moya, 2010). Basing our procedure on that used by Jost and Kay (2005), we made each type of sexism salient by asking women to indicate the extent to which either items of the benevolent sexism scale or items of the hostile sexism scale were clearly worded.

Participants in a control group only answered the questions that served to assess the dependent variables. Participants exposed to benevolent sexism attributed more importance to sociability and less importance to competence than participants exposed to hostile sexism and participants in the control condition. Moreover, in a subsequent study, we observed that female participants who expected to collaborate with a partner who held benevolent sexist beliefs were more likely to relinquish leadership to the sexist partner than were female participants who expected to collaborate with a partner who did not hold such beliefs. This is consistent with the argument set forth by Jackman (1994) that paternalistic exhortations (that praise subordinates for manifesting a narrow range of communal traits and make affection for individual subordinates contingent on them manifesting the designated traits) can be more coercive than hostility and derogation.

There are also factors that moderate the extent to which blatant sexism affects its targets. For instance, when sexism is perceived as a challenge (rather than a threat) women present themselves in ways that disconfirm stereotypic expectations (Cihangir et al., 2013). Likewise, interventions that help women affirm their individual self-worth (if they do not identify strongly with their gender group) or serve to affirm their group's collective worth (if they identify strongly with their gender group) can help counter the adverse effects of stereotype threat (Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2009). Exposure to counter-stereotypic examples such as female leaders can also help women resist stereotypes. Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) found that exposure to environments where female leaders are scarce increases women's gender stereotype adherence, both at the explicit and implicit level. When female leaders were present, women revealed stronger implicit associations between women and leadership (relative to caregiving) than when no female leaders were present in the environment. Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, and McManus (2011) also found that contact with female experts in science, technology, engineering,

and mathematics enhanced female students' implicit associations between themselves and these fields, as well as their self-confidence and motivation to pursue related careers.

### *Gender Identification, Confrontation, and Protest*

When members of devalued groups encounter discrimination, they can join others in a collective attempt to combat group discrimination (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998). Yet, women who succeed in entering high-status positions often decrease the extent to which they identify with their gender group, and derogate ingroup members who have not fared as well (Ellemers et al., 2004). These so-called 'queen bees' distance themselves from other women as a way to escape sexist treatment at work (Derks, Van Laar, Ellemers, & De Groot, 2011). However, women who encounter sexism can also choose to increase the extent to which they identify with their group (Redersdorff, Martinot, & Branscombe, 2004). Identifying with a socially devalued group has important psychological benefits, such as increases in self-esteem (Schmitt et al., 2002). One reason why group identification has this effect is that it draws individuals to the group, exposing them to its positive definition of the group, its social support, and its resources. In this sense, group identification itself constitutes a resource to which group members can turn to resist the negative effects of prejudice or discrimination (Leach, Rodriguez-Mosquera, Vliek, & Hirt, 2010).

Group identification is a strong predictor of whether members engage in behavior that helps improve their group's position (Barreto & Ellemers, 2000; Veenstra & Haslam, 2000). When group members who perceive that they are targets of discrimination increase their group identification, this helps them engage in protest behaviors with the aim of achieving social change (Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003). However, this type of response is impaired when prejudice is more subtle. Evidence from our

laboratory demonstrates that whereas blatant discrimination leads to intentions to protest, subtle discrimination does not (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009). This is partly because blatant discrimination is perceived as discriminatory and elicits anger in its targets (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005a, 2005b), an emotion that is an important precursor to collective action (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). The negative emotions more typically elicited by subtle prejudice, such as anxiety or sadness, are directed at the self, and are less likely to lead to protest responses. Gill and Matheson (2006) showed that participants who were induced to feel sad were less likely to endorse collective action as a response to discrimination than those who were made to feel angry. However, group identification can lose its protective properties when targets encounter more subtle forms of prejudice. Thus, another way in which subtle prejudice is self-fulfilling is that it impairs group identification and collective protest, and fails to fuel attempts at social change.

Although collective action is a promising strategy to achieve social change, it is also one that requires coordination with the ingroup and resources that are not always available. In daily life, women often encounter sexism in the form of sexist jokes, objectifying comments, or the expression of gender stereotypes (Swim et al., 2001). In such cases, women are more likely to hesitate to confront the source of sexism and instead ponder whether or not collective action is necessary. Confronting sexism is an assertive response that involves directly addressing the source of sexism (Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2006). Confronting is beneficial both for the individual target and for the group as a whole. Confrontation by one person increases the degree to which others will also confront (Rasinski & Czopp, 2010). With regard to benefits to the individual target, confronting prejudice induces feelings of closure (Hyers, 2007), ensures a feeling of competence and self-efficacy (Gervais, Hillard, & Vescio, 2010), and creates a sense of empowerment

(Haslett & Lipman, 1997). Confrontation can also reduce stereotyping and therefore benefit the group as a whole (Czopp, Monteith, & Mark, 2006).

Despite the benefits of confrontation, targets of prejudice do not confront perpetrators as often as they imagine they would (Swim & Hyers, 1999). One reason why this is the case is that confronting prejudice is associated with important social costs, in that those who confront it are negatively evaluated, even if it is obvious that they were treated unfairly (Kaiser & Miller, 2001). This is partly because those who confront threaten fundamental beliefs in a just world (Kaiser, Dyrenforth, & Hagiwara, 2006) and partly because women who confront sexist perpetrators behave counter to stereotypical prescriptions of women as non-assertive (Rudman & Glick, 1999).

Another factor that affects how confronters are evaluated is the identity of the perceiver. In the case of sexism, female confronters are more negatively evaluated by male perceivers (Dodd, Giuliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001), or by female perceivers who identify weakly with their group (Kaiser, Hagiwara, Malahy, & Wilkins, 2009). Ingroup members can derogate an ingroup confronter for fear that this behavior might reflect negatively on the group (Garcia, Reser, Amo, Redersdorff, & Branscombe, 2005). Indeed, confrontation can be both costly and beneficial for the group – it can help achieve social change, but it can also portray the group (and its members) as overly-sensitive. Group members are more likely to support confrontation by ingroup members when they perceive sexism to be pervasive (Garcia, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Ellemers, 2010; Kahn, Barreto, Kaiser, & Rego, 2011). Also, women are more likely to support confrontation when it is done in a normative way, while non-normative confrontations can actually alienate ingroup members (Becker & Barreto, 2012).

In sum, women can and often do resist sexism by drawing on their group and joining in collective protest. However, everyday sexist events do not always seem to justify collective action, nor is such action always possible

without appropriate coordination and resources. In such situations, individual women can still choose to confront perpetrators, and this has important benefits as well. However, these actions are not always equally supported by women themselves, because they entail both costs and benefits to those who confront perpetrators of sexism as well as the group as a whole.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR ANTI-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES AND REGULATIONS**

Looking beyond gender stereotypes as blatant beliefs about the inferiority of women helps demonstrate that gender stereotypes are more than just cognitive shortcuts that are used as innocuous tools to reduce the complexity of social situations. Instead, there are clear prescriptive overtones and normative expectations associated with such stereotypical beliefs, and violating these implicit expectations incurs strong social sanctions. Even if this does not occur explicitly or intentionally, there is convincing empirical evidence to show that behavior that deviates from the stereotype is perceived more extremely, is misunderstood, or reflects negatively on other aspects of the individual even if the information available is not relevant to such inferences. In the case of women, displays of competence are costly in that they tend to result in a loss of perceived warmth, so that competent women are not seen as 'proper women'.

As a result, sexist views and unequal treatment can permeate institutional practices, even when such institutionalized forms of sexism are unintentional. Nevertheless, the cumulative effects of repeated exposure to such views and practices on the self-esteem, ambitions, and performance of women can be very real and pervasive, even if these women are not consciously aware that this is the case. In fact, the more subtle the expression of sexism, the greater the likelihood that women will attribute their lower outcomes to

their own lack of ability, suboptimal decision-making, or personal 'choices', and the harder it is to detect that these outcomes are in fact due to other people's sexist beliefs. Not only does this undermine the development of women's confidence and competencies, it also causes women, as well as men, to underestimate and under-report the occurrence of sexism.

### ***Specifying Balanced Procedures***

Whereas formal regulations to ban blatant sexism are important and form a crucial legal basis for any further action, putting in place such regulations is not enough. Because of the implicit and innocuous appearance of modern sexist expressions, it is not always clear when or how such formal regulations speak to concrete situations in which sexism plays a role. As such, policy and legislation cannot rely on people's good intentions to avoid sexism, nor can they assume that those who suffer from modern sexism will recognize the cause of unfair outcomes, let alone communicate this to others.

The use of set rules, and concrete procedures that ensure non-sexist practices and monitor adherence to these practices, eliminates reliance on the good intentions of individual decision-makers or managers in the organization as the primary way to avoid sexism. It also takes away the burden of proof from those who may suffer from sexist practices, reducing the chances that these remain unchallenged simply because targets are unaware of their sexist treatment or are reluctant to expose this for fear of retaliation.

### ***Monitoring Group Level Outcomes***

A second implication of our analysis is based on the realization that the implicit nature of modern expressions of sexism may effectively deter individual women from stating their ambition or displaying their competence, making their lack of (career) success or material outcomes seem the result of their



own 'free choice' (Stephens & Levine, 2011). The collection and active distribution of aggregate information about the treatment and outcomes of different groups in organizations may help people see whether there are differential group-based outcomes, which are less likely to be noted from personal experience alone. An organization that clearly monitors and cares about equal treatment and sanctions inequality is likely to enhance individual motivation to seek information about unequal treatment, and may more easily draw out comments from others who observe such events.

### ***Helping Overcome Costs of Prejudice Detection***

Not only are modern expressions of sexism hard to detect, but there are also quite substantial personal costs and social sanctions of protesting sexist treatment. Practices that buffer emotional well-being, personal or social esteem can help lower the emotional costs of recognizing prejudice. Identifying the ways in which individual outcomes are influenced by the stereotypic expectations of themselves and others may help women preempt the pernicious effects this tends to have. Even if women cannot always avoid sexist treatment, such knowledge may help them regain feelings of control and self-determination and facilitate attempts to re-establish a contingency between their own efforts and the outcomes they realize. The motivational costs of detecting sexist treatment can also be lowered by measures that increase future expectations of success, or restore just world beliefs. To achieve this, the support women receive from men might be crucial. When men acknowledge sexist treatment, this is likely to be taken as a valid judgment, while similar statements from women may meet suspicion and be regarded as self-interested or biased. Furthermore, men are more likely to hold the positions of power from which sexist practices can be changed. Thus, validation and support from men might be crucial to lower perceived pervasiveness of

sexism, and their willingness to expose and address any sexist practices can contribute to the restoration of just world beliefs.

Additionally, costs of well-being as well as motivational costs of exposing sexist treatment are lowered when individuals and organizations convey their openness to such complaints. Raising the awareness that sexist treatment may persist despite good intentions, should remove some of the blame from those who perpetuate biased practices. This in turn is likely to make it easier for these individuals as well as the organizations that employ them to be open to receiving and acting upon such complaints. Developing concrete procedures to file complaints, or actively drawing these out (e.g., through evaluation forms or employee satisfaction surveys) implicitly conveys that the organization acknowledges that sexist treatment may occur despite rules designed to prevent this, and that notifying the organization of such occurrences is encouraged.

### ***Supporting and Encouraging Women***

Research into stereotype threat and self-fulfilling prophecies indicates that women tend to underperform when the dominance of men in the situation raises implicit expectations that stereotypically female traits and competencies are less valued. Some of the efforts intended to counter such effects focus on individual women and their personal competencies and achievements. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that such individual-level 'solutions' constitute an ineffective way to address differential opportunities as a broader group-level problem. Indeed, if anti-discrimination efforts only target the performance of individual women, this may disadvantage women as a group, for instance through the creation of 'queen bees' who are not representative of other women. This implies that any practices intended to encourage individual women should take care that this does not replace acknowledgment of differential opportunities as a group-level problem, nor should it diminish organizational support for additional – group-level – solutions.

### Promoting Affirmative Action

People tend to resist affirmative action policies: women who might benefit from such policies tend to indicate a preference for showing their worth without the support of such measures, while men may complain that they introduce another (micro-level) type of injustice as individual men may be disadvantaged by broader policies that specifically target women as a group (see Crosby, Sabattini, & Aizawa, Chapter 29 this volume). Nevertheless, such group-level action is, and will remain, necessary, if only to counter the suggestion that it is the responsibility of individual women to secure their own advancement. Affirmative action policies can help build identity-safe environments, as the more women are present, the less threatening the environment, and the greater the likelihood that women display their motivation and competencies, instead of adapting their ambitions and behaviors to gender role expectations. Doing this for a number of women at the same time may ameliorate the potential negative effects of affirmative action that have been documented in the literature (Heilman, Block, & Stathatos, 1997).

### CONCLUSION

Sexism still differentially affects the ambitions, performance, and outcomes of women compared to men. At the same time, research shows that sexist expectations and practices often remain hidden but still affect decisions, statements, and actions implicitly, even among the well-intentioned. Further, legal practices that rely on women to label incidents as sexist and reporting them fails to take into account the difficulties that targets of discrimination encounter in detecting and reporting such disadvantages. Any measures attempting to counter discriminatory practices therefore need to acknowledge that biases are pervasive, often occur unintentionally, and may

remain unchallenged. This implies that even when targets do not identify biased treatment as a factor influencing their outcomes, structural provisions should be taken to monitor and document gender inequalities, and to develop individual as well as group level measures to ensure equal opportunities for men and women alike.

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# Appraising Gender Discrimination as Legitimate or Illegitimate: Antecedents and Consequences

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## INTRODUCTION

I am most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of 'Women's Rights', with all its attendant horrors, on which her poor feeble sex is bent, forgetting every sense of womanly feelings and propriety. Feminists ought to get a good whipping. Were women to 'unsex' themselves by claiming equality with men, they would become the most hateful, heathen and disgusting of beings and would surely perish without male protection. (Letter of Queen Victoria, February 3, 1853)

Much has changed in the 160 years since Queen Victoria spoke out so strongly against gender equality. In the 21st century, very few people (particularly women) would argue so fervently against equal opportunities and equal rights for women. Despite the progress that has been made in advancing women's legal and political rights, gender discrimination is not necessarily a problem of the past. Women continue to be systematically disadvantaged in

many areas of life, including the labor force where women still face significant inequality in terms of pay for equal work (Vasquez, 2001). Barriers to advancement take the shape of 'glass ceilings' (Kanter, 1977; Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990) and 'glass cliffs' (Ryan & Haslam, 2007), which impede women from achieving their full potential as they seek to climb the corporate ladder. Even though gender discrimination may be less blatant than in the past (see Barreto & Ellemers, 2005, Chapter 18 this volume), concerns about discrimination and its accompanying social devaluation in male-dominated domains can have a demoralizing effect on women and negatively affect their well-being (Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002), job aspirations (Gupta & Bhawe, 2007), and task performance (Betz, Ramsey, & Sekaquaptewa, Chapter 26 this volume; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002). Moreover, there is evidence that sexism drives socio-structural

outcomes, with a longitudinal investigation of 57 societies showing that sexism enhances the severity of gender inequality over time (Brandt, 2011).

However depressing these observations might be to 21st-century women, there is a glimmer of hope: even though gender discrimination is far from eradicated and the status of women as a group continues to be lower than that of men, the perception of the legitimacy of such inequality has changed dramatically. Gender discrimination is no longer perceived as just or how things *ought* to be (as in Queen Victoria's time), with most developed societies having policies and legislation in place that outlaw exclusion on the basis of gender. For example, the major aim of the Australian Sex Discrimination Act (1984) is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Likewise, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law for Men and Women (1985) that was established in Japan and the anti-gender discrimination law that took effect in Korea in 1999 seek to accomplish the same goal. Similarly, since 1967, affirmative action programs in the United States have required federal contractors to ensure that there is no gender bias in their hiring and promotion decisions. Nevertheless, not all countries have sufficient legislation in place requiring equal treatment of men and women. A recent report by the World Bank and International Finance Corporation (2011) finds that out of the 141 countries studied, the vast majority of the countries (103) still impose differential legal treatment on the basis of gender in at least some areas of life.

Although a considerable body of research has addressed the extent to which women perceive the negative treatment they receive as discrimination, much less research has assessed the extent to which such discrimination is appraised as legitimate or illegitimate. In this chapter we will argue that perceptions of possible gender discrimination reflect two separate judgments: whether an outcome is due to differential treatment on the basis of gender, and whether this treatment is perceived as legitimate or illegitimate. By separating these

judgments, we can examine instances of both illegitimate *and* legitimate gender discrimination appraisals and the responses they evoke. In this way, we can illuminate a wider spectrum of discrimination experiences and develop a more comprehensive understanding of responses to gender discrimination than has been considered so far. In this chapter, we focus on antecedents that can affect women's perceptions of the legitimacy of gender discrimination events. We then consider the consequences of perceiving gender discrimination as legitimate or illegitimate from the perspectives of both women and men. We begin by defining key concepts.

## DEFINING GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Social psychologists have typically defined discrimination in terms of the differential treatment members of one group receive compared to another. For example, when a woman is denied a promotion at work because of her gender (as the US Supreme Court agreed occurred in the *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* case; Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991), we are likely to label such incidents as discrimination. That is, we define an instance of negative treatment as discrimination when people face negative outcomes *because of* their group membership.

In everyday life, such instances of group-based exclusion are seen as discriminatory to the extent that they are perceived as illegitimate or unjust. For example, we are more likely to label the experience of a woman being denied promotion as discrimination when she is excluded for an illegitimate reason – because she is not feminine enough (Fiske et al., 1991) – but not when she lacks the appropriate qualifications (then the outcome is appraised as legitimate exclusion). Similarly, we are more likely to label an instance of negative treatment as gender discrimination when the basis for the differential treatment is perceived as being based on inaccurate stereotypes (e.g., ‘female leaders are not as

effective as male leaders'). More generally, forms of gender-based negative treatment that are grounded in inaccurate beliefs are more likely to be labeled as illegitimate forms of discrimination, whereas accurate beliefs are associated with legitimate forms of exclusion and group-based treatment (Allport, 1954).

Despite the fact that many forms of discrimination are perceived to be illegitimate (and based on inaccurate stereotypes), many other forms continue to be perceived as legitimate, sometimes even by the targets themselves (Barron & Hebl, 2010; Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002; Crocker & Major, 1994; DePaulo, 2006; Jetten, Schmitt, Branscombe, Garza, & Mewse, 2011; Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004; Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). The idea that differential treatment and the perceived legitimacy of such treatment are separate dimensions (see Crandall et al., 2002, for a similar point) is captured by some definitions of discrimination, but not by others. For example, Major, Quinton, and McCoy (2002) define discrimination as 'an unjustified negative or harmful action toward the members of a group, simply because of their membership in that group' (p. 264), precluding the possibility that legitimacy and negative outcomes could be orthogonal. Thus, for these authors, illegitimacy/injustice is a prerequisite for defining differential group-based treatment as discrimination. However, what is perceived to be justified or unjustified treatment can vary tremendously across time. For example, Queen Victoria's assessment of the illegitimacy of gender discrimination is quite different from what most women nowadays believe and endorse. In a similar vein, and in relation to race-based outcomes, in the United States prior to the Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, exclusion of African Americans from white schools was widely deemed to be legitimate. However, this changed after the desegregation decision, which made segregation in public schools illegal and thereby illegitimate (see Adams, Biernat, Branscombe,

Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008). At times, we also find the reverse trend: negative treatment that was once appraised as illegitimate becomes increasingly appraised as more legitimate over time. For example, with the fall of the Berlin Wall, women in former East Germany lost the protection of many laws that gave them equality with men in many areas of life during the communist era (e.g., generous maternity leave arrangements, access to childcare facilities, divorce legislation; Bennhold, 2010).

Other definitions of discrimination do not require illegitimacy or inaccuracy, and thereby open up the possibility that discrimination can be appraised as either legitimate or illegitimate (or be based on either accurate or inaccurate perceptions of disadvantaged groups). For example, Brown (1995) defines discrimination as 'the expression of negative affect, ... towards members of a group on account of their membership of that group' (p. 8). Similarly, Stephan (1983) defines prejudice and discrimination as 'a negative attitude towards members of socially defined groups' (p. 417). Neither includes reference to either the legitimacy or accuracy of the attitude.

In this chapter, we will employ this less restrictive definition, and in doing so illustrate that existing studies on perceiving and responding to discrimination have been limited to contexts in which discrimination is perceived as illegitimate by those who are disadvantaged (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Postmes, 2003). Although there is less research examining responses of both targets and perpetrators of discrimination to forms of discrimination that are appraised as relatively legitimate, as we will outline below, this is unfortunate because perceiving discrimination as legitimate may have different, even opposite, consequences for women and men. Before elaborating on these consequences, we first address the question of what determines whether negative group-based treatment will be perceived and labeled as discrimination or not.

## **WHEN IS AN INSTANCE OF GROUP-BASED TREATMENT LABELED 'DISCRIMINATION'?**

It is not always easy to determine whether gender discrimination underlies instances of differential treatment of men and women. There is a large body of work addressing the factors that determine when victims of discrimination attribute their outcomes to discrimination and when they fail to do so (Crosby, 1984; Major et al., 2002; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002). For example, women are likely to underestimate the extent to which they personally face discrimination, but more readily attribute negative outcomes to discrimination when treatment is directed at their group as a whole (Crosby, 1984; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990). This personal-group ratings difference is largely due to the fact that when women judge how much they personally are discriminated against they compare their own experiences to those of other women (i.e., an intragroup comparison), but when they judge the extent to which women as a group are discriminated against they compare women's experiences to those of men as a group (i.e., an intergroup comparison; Postmes, Branscombe, Spears, & Young, 1999). In addition, when negative treatment involves isolated events, it can be difficult to establish whether they are group-based or not because aggregate information about the treatment that members of one group receive compared to the other is lacking (Crosby, Clayton, Alksnis, & Hemker, 1986).

### ***Individual-Level Factors that Affect Perceptions of Discrimination***

There is evidence that individual differences – for example, differences in self-consciousness, need for social approval, sensitivity to rejection, or self monitoring – can inhibit people from attributing negative outcomes to discrimination (for an overview, see Feldman Barrett & Swim, 1998). Specific beliefs about the nature of gender status relations and opportunities for advancement have also been found to play a

role. For example, Major and colleagues (2002; Study 3) showed that the more women endorsed individual mobility beliefs such as: 'advancement in American society is possible for both men and women', the less likely they were to perceive negative treatment by a male as reflecting gender discrimination.

Appraisals concerning whether exclusion reflects gender discrimination or not are further complicated by the fact that attributions to gender discrimination depend on 'who is excluded by whom'. That is, observers are more likely to appraise negative treatment as discrimination when it fits their expectations of what discrimination involves. Exclusion is more likely to be appraised as discrimination when a powerful group (e.g., men) discriminates against a less powerful group (e.g., women; Inman, Huerta, & Oh, 1998; Rodin, Price, Bryson, & Sanchez, 1990), when the victim of discrimination is a prototypical victim (e.g., women) and the perpetrator is a member of a prototypical dominant group ('men'; Inman & Baron, 1996), or when the behavior is seen as prototypical of discrimination or sexism (e.g., men inappropriately touching women; Swim, Mallett, Russo-Devosa, & Stangor, 2005). In contrast, observers are less likely to make attributions to discrimination when an unexpected source engages in group-based negative treatment (Baron, Burgess, & Kao, 1991; O'Brien, Kinias, & Major, 2008). Therefore, one important determinant of whether attributions to discrimination are evoked depends on whether the negative treatment involves an intergroup comparison (e.g., men excluding women) or an intragroup comparison (e.g., women excluding other women).

There are a number of steps that must be negotiated to determine whether or not one's outcomes are due to gender discrimination. Stangor and colleagues (2003) identified three information-processing stages that can affect awareness of, and responses to, discrimination. These stages include an initial 'asking' stage (i.e., is this discrimination?), followed by an 'answering' stage (e.g., interpretation of event as discriminatory or not),



and an ‘announcing’ stage (e.g., if the event is appraised as discrimination, do individuals publicly state this to others or not). At each of these steps, an individual might ‘pull away’ from a gender discrimination attribution, which means that potential gender discrimination may be neither recognized nor addressed.

### ***Structural and Contextual Factors that Affect Perceptions of Discrimination***

Aside from individual-level factors and processes that determine whether people will appraise negative treatment as discrimination, it should be kept in mind that there is an important group-level dimension to such appraisals. As many definitions of discrimination emphasize, such attributions involve the perception that treatment is not strictly personal and, instead, is group-based (e.g., I’m being excluded *because* I’m a woman). In recognition of this, before people can ask the question ‘Is the discrimination I am facing just and fair?’ they first need to become aware that the exclusion they are experiencing is group-based and thus is gender discrimination.

Self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) can help explain the conditions under which individuals appraise their exclusion as individual-level or as group-based exclusion. Important in this is the extent to which gender becomes a salient category to understand the negative treatment. Salience of the category is mostly determined by the extent to which gender is a normatively and comparatively fitting category to make sense of the context. For example, gender is comparatively fitting when, within a particular organization, it is only men who are promoted, and never are qualified women. This enhances ‘us’ versus ‘them’ perceptions whereby one gender group is perceived as the advantaged and the other gender group as the disadvantaged group. Further, gender is normatively fitting when in this organization women are mostly employed in stereotypically feminine roles

(e.g., secretary) and men in mostly stereotypically male roles (e.g., manager). This enhances perceptions that women and men have different skill sets that make them better suited for particular tasks or roles within the organization. When comparative and normative fit is high, it is more likely that self-definitions in terms of gender (i.e., woman or man) will be salient and that both men and women will perceive the context through the lens of gender and gender differences.

Many structural and contextual factors determine whether gender becomes a normatively and comparatively fitting categorization and whether self-definitions in terms of gender will occur. For example, attributions to discrimination are more likely when discrimination is perceived as pervasive and widespread than when its occurrence is rare (Branscombe et al., 1999; Schmitt et al., 2003). Perceptions of the legitimacy of group-based exclusion are also affected by the belief that differences between groups are immutable and unchangeable (e.g., existing biological differences between men and women explain the differential treatment). Such perceptions are associated with essentialized views of gender groups whereby perceivers exaggerate the perceived similarities among the members of a category and the perceived differences between the categories (see Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000; Yzerbyt & Rocher, 2002).

From the perspective of perpetrator groups, essentialized perceptions about gender groups might then be used to justify gender inequality (see Morton, Chapter 23 this volume). Yet, essentialized beliefs about groups can themselves shift over time. It has, for instance, been found that whether status differences are perceived as stable or as likely to change in the future, affects the extent to which group differences are justified (by essentializing differences between women and men; Morton, Postmes, Haslam, & Hornsey, 2009). Specifically, Morton and colleagues showed that a relationship between the endorsement of sexist beliefs and gender essentialism exists only for men,

but not for women, and only when the gender gap between men and women was said to be closing in the future. Thus, perpetrator groups essentialize group differences when they perceive their current privileged status to be threatened, which motivates them to justify the existing status inequalities and exclusion of disadvantaged group members.

Indeed, there is evidence that perceptions of whether one's group has engaged in illegitimate exclusion varies as a function of perpetrator group motivational concerns. For example, Miron, Branscombe, and Biernat (2010) showed that identification with the perpetrator group can encourage people to raise standards so their group's treatment of the other group seems less unfair. In particular, highly identified group members needed more evidence that their group had engaged in unjust behavior than group members whose identification was lower. Thus, justifications for gender inequality and gender discrimination are not set in stone; rather they depend on the perceiver's gender (i.e., whether one benefits from or is disadvantaged by gender inequality), as well as perceptions of the status relations between the gender groups, structural barriers (i.e., perceived pervasiveness of discrimination), and the likelihood that existing status relations will change in the future.

### **IS THIS INSTANCE OF DISCRIMINATION LEGITIMATE OR ILLEGITIMATE?**

While there is much research on when an instance of exclusion will be attributed to discrimination, a question examined far less often is whether victims perceive group-based differential treatment as legitimate or illegitimate. So far, it has been assumed (albeit at times implicitly) that the decision to label treatment as group-based discrimination implies a judgment that such treatment is illegitimate. There is very little research examining another option: when women may attribute negative treatment to group-based

discrimination, but still appraise it to be legitimate or appropriate.

To appreciate the idea that gender discrimination can be appraised as legitimate by both those victimized by it as well as the perpetrator group, it is instructive to examine how women's appraisals of gender inequality have changed over time. There are many examples of gender discrimination that were once perceived by its victims to be legitimate and that have come to be seen as increasingly illegitimate over time (Kelman, 2001). Up until a few decades ago, it was widely acceptable in many developed countries that married women should be excluded from paid employment. Furthermore, common practices such as banning women from voting, obtaining a university education, or entering certain occupations (e.g., medicine) have come to be perceived as illegitimate only in the past few decades. Even though, historically speaking, women have only recently acquired such rights, this is often forgotten when we consider countries where some forms of gender discrimination are still perceived as relatively legitimate (e.g., not allowing women to drive a car in Saudi Arabia or banning girls from education in Afghanistan; see Kurtiş & Adams, Chapter 16 this volume).

Even though many forms of gender discrimination are now perceived as illegitimate in the Western world, there continue to be some professions from which women are excluded and such exclusion is still widely regarded as relatively legitimate (e.g., the Catholic priesthood, certain military roles). It is also the case that even though some blatant forms of discrimination may no longer be tolerated (e.g., women losing their jobs once they get married), there is also evidence that the differential treatment is not completely eradicated (e.g., married women still face more gender-based differential treatment in the labor market compared to unmarried women; World Bank, 2011). Moreover, as Crandall et al. (2002) showed, prejudice and discrimination against particular subgroups of women is still seen as relatively acceptable (e.g., female prostitutes, feminists).

Consequently, even though one form of exclusion may be addressed as a result of its perceived illegitimacy (e.g., changing the law in Saudi Arabia so that women can vote beginning in 2015), other forms of discrimination can continue to exist (e.g., not allowing women to drive in Saudi Arabia). What these examples underline is that the perceived (il)legitimacy of discrimination is dependent on context, historical developments, and broader socio-structural factors that shape gender relations.

What causes such shifts in the perceived legitimacy of discrimination? In particular, what is the process of de-legitimization whereby those who are affected by discrimination begin to contest the legitimacy of their negative treatment? De-legitimization begins when group members develop a shared consciousness about their group-based exclusion. Gurin (1985; see also Gurin, & Townsend, 1986) identifies a number of processes that may lead women to question the validity of existing rationales for their negative treatment. In particular, consciousness of group disadvantage is enhanced when (a) women have a collective orientation that allows them to perceive discrimination as affecting all women as a group rather than just some individuals, (b) women identify with other women and perceive they have similar values and beliefs, (c) women become discontent about their low status and power, and (d) when women no longer perceive existing disparities as fair and legitimate. Therefore, if women's low status and lack of power is perceived to result from fair and just processes (e.g., a lack of merit or effort), then it is less likely that the status quo will be questioned. However, if disparities are perceived to be the result of illegitimate structural or attitudinal causes (e.g., when exclusion is unrelated to merit or effort), consciousness about gender discrimination increases and social identity becomes politicized (Simon & Klandermans, 2001).

Central to Gurin's analysis is the idea that women need to become aware that they are collectively, rather than individually, disadvantaged. It is often only when such collective

awareness results in changed perceptions of the legitimacy of gender discrimination that anti-gender discrimination legislation is introduced. Thus, legislation often lags behind societal shifts in legitimacy perceptions, with laws typically being introduced *after* society's perceptions about the legitimacy of certain forms of discrimination have changed. Despite the fact that legislation often reflects societal changes in the perceived legitimacy of discrimination rather than bringing about such changes, legislation serves an important function in speeding up the process of consciousness raising and consolidating changed societal norms (Barron & Hebl, 2010). Of particular importance is the extent to which legislation protects women from gender discrimination and facilitates the de-legitimizing of forms of gender discrimination that were once seen as acceptable.

Legislation appears to be effective in reducing discrimination, not only deterring perpetrators from engaging in discrimination (because the costs of being caught doing so are greater when appropriate legislation is in place; Landes, 1968), but also creating clear societal norms that discrimination is unacceptable (Crandall et al., 2002). Anti-discrimination legislation has been shown to lower the frequency of discrimination and improve the position of those targeted (Donohue & Heckman, 1991). After reviewing the empirical evidence of the effect of various Western policies and legislation (e.g., affirmative action) aimed at countering gender discrimination in particular, Gunderson (1989) concluded that such policies have raised the wages of women compared to men by 10–20%. In addition, a report by the World Bank (2011) highlights how law reform can lead to social change. For example, changes to the constitution in Kenya have eliminated many forms of gender differentiation (e.g., women being able to pass on legal citizenship to their children or spouse, equal inheritance rights for women and men).

At times, it appears that perceptions of the legitimacy of discrimination change not because of a conscious effort to address

questions relating to legitimacy, but simply as the byproduct of other social change. For example, one of the main reasons why women achieved suffrage in the UK in 1918 was that men left to go to war and women needed to take on the jobs left by the men. For the first time, women were given the opportunity to fulfill jobs and roles from which they had previously been excluded and this enhanced their ability to push for social change and greater equality. Indeed, it has been argued that it was the First World War and the discontinuity that this represented for British society that helped to speed up the process of tackling gender inequality. Specifically, stereotypes that women were unfit for political and working life were challenged by the fact that women had undertaken such activities while men were at war (Whitfield, 2001).

Women's rights also changed in response to other societal shifts that had little to do with gender equality. Indeed, there were many different reasons for those who joined the British suffrage movement to seek constitutional change. Whereas some men and women campaigned for change because they felt there were no legitimate grounds to exclude women from voting or from public office, others (in particular middle-class women) campaigned because they felt women's 'kinder nature' would have a civilizing effect on society (e.g., leading to greater control on alcohol distribution; Whitfield, 2001). Thus, ironically, rather than challenging gender stereotypes, stereotypical and essentialized views of how men and women differ can be used to instigate change (see Morton, Chapter 23 this volume).

### ***Different Forms of Gender Discrimination***

Some have argued that it is not so much that gender discrimination and sexism no longer exist, but rather that its form and expression have changed (see Barreto & Ellemers, Chapter 18 this volume; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). In particular, subtle, ambivalent or modern forms of sexism have replaced

more blatant, old-fashioned, and hostile forms of sexism (Dovidio, 2001; Dovidio & Gaertner, 2004; Glick et al., 2004; Jackman, 1994). Even though modern forms of sexism might, at first sight, appear less problematic than old-fashioned sexism, there is evidence that it is benevolent forms of sexism that legitimize gender discrimination and consolidate gender inequality (Barreto & Ellemers, Chapter 18 this volume; Swim et al., 1995). Other work indicates that benevolent sexism is associated with enhanced endorsement of discriminatory beliefs, attributions, and behaviors (Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003; Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Sibley, Overall, & Duckitt, 2007).

Thus, modern forms of sexism have hidden costs, and can prevent women from coping with discrimination because such sexism is largely legitimized (Glick & Fiske, 2001) and is therefore difficult to contest (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009). Indeed, exposure to more subtle forms of prejudice has equally negative consequences as exposure to blatant prejudice (Dion & Earn, 1975). What seems to differ, however, is the nature of the consequences: hostile sexism is more readily recognized and is less likely to be perceived as legitimate. As a result, women feel empowered to respond with anger to such forms of discrimination (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005), which facilitates a collective response to discrimination (see Jetten et al., 2011).

At a societal level, the fact that subtle forms of gender discrimination have replaced more blatant forms contributes to the perception that gender discrimination no longer exists (Stephens & Levine, 2011). One consequence of this is that women's failure or inability to climb the corporate ladder is more likely to be attributed to individual-level factors (e.g., women choosing to stay at home raising children instead of having a career) than to structural barriers that prevent the advancement of women in the workforce. Importantly, such attributions to choice have consequences for women's well-being. Stephens and Levine (2011) showed that women who framed their departure from the workforce as an individual

choice reported higher well-being than women who were less likely to adopt a choice framework. Furthermore, women who adopted a choice framework (compared to those who did so to a lesser extent) were less likely to recognize structural barriers and gender discrimination as limiting women's professional advancement.

### ***Individual and Collective Beliefs Affecting Responses to Gender Discrimination***

There are a number of individual-level beliefs that affect the extent to which victims of gender discrimination accept negative treatment. Individual differences in the endorsement of meritocracy and belief in a just world have been found to enhance perceptions that the status quo is fair and just (Major et al., 2002; Major & Schmader, 2001). Other work has focused on the extent to which people prefer and support hierarchies within society (e.g., men being the dominant group and women the disadvantaged group). For instance, those individuals who endorse social dominance statements to a greater extent (e.g., 'some groups are inferior to other groups') are also more likely to be tolerant of sexual harassment (Russell & Trigg, 2004) and sexism more generally (Sidanius, Levin, Liu, & Pratto, 2000).

Other theories, including system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Hunyady, 2002) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), argue that to understand responses to gender discrimination one needs to examine gender relations at the societal or group level. When we aim to understand responses to gender discrimination, it is in particular these theories that are most relevant because they aid in understanding the way legitimacy perceptions are shaped by status differences and the broader socio-structural context. Let us examine the basic premises of these theories as they apply to the question of when gender discrimination will be perceived as legitimate or illegitimate.

System justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Hunyady, 2002) posits that advantaged and disadvantaged group members have the same general motivation to rationalize the status quo – including existing status relations between men and women. From this view, the motivation to see the political, economic, and social system as just might be so strong that, in the case of disadvantaged group members, it overrides their concern for their own self-interests. There is now a large body of research suggesting that it is not just advantaged groups, such as men, that legitimize the system (and the inequality inherent in that system) but that disadvantaged groups (i.e., women) also sometimes engage in system justification (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

System legitimizing beliefs may play an important role in the justification of gender inequality and gender discrimination (see also the concept of hierarchy-enhancing beliefs in social dominance theory; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). An example of such a legitimizing belief is the idea that women are more communal and warm than men. Even though these are clearly positive attributes, the greater communality of women compared to men may be construed as justifying the argument that women are less suitable for high-status jobs. Thus, legitimizing myths that are consensually endorsed by men and women serve the purpose of rationalizing the status quo, whereby women's perceived different strengths compared to men do not directly undermine women's status, but do so indirectly by enhancing the belief that women are unsuitable for stereotypically male positions (Jost & Kay, 2005). In this way, system-justifying beliefs may not only enhance the legitimacy of gender inequality, but also excuse negative treatment based on gender. There is evidence that the salience of system justifying motives can enhance the extent to which men and women self-stereotype in line with gender stereotypes (i.e., women as communal and men as agentic; Laurin, Kay, & Shepherd, 2011). Among women, such enhanced self-stereotyping as communal can, in turn, elevate the perceived legitimacy of the system. The notion



that women might subscribe to system justifying beliefs that serve to rationalize the status quo is akin to social creativity in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social creativity strategies are known to emerge in socio-structural contexts where women perceive there to be significant barriers to their advancement to the high status positions typically held by men (i.e., where the boundaries between the groups are perceived to be impermeable) and when the status quo is stable and unlikely to change in the future. Given a stable system, social creativity strategies involve subtle ways of bolstering the identity of a group facing discrimination but in no way change the status quo (Ellemers, 2002; Lemaine, 1974). Tajfel and Turner (1986) identified a number of distinct social creativity strategies. For example, women can redefine the dimensions on which they compare themselves with men and focus on creating positive distinctiveness for women by claiming they are more communal than men (Lemaine, 1974; see also Crocker & Major, 1994). Women can also shift the importance placed on group attributes (Crocker & Major, 1994; Ellemers & Van Rijswijk, 1997), for example, by highlighting the importance of family life over having a successful career. Finally, women may select another outgroup with which to compare their own group (e.g., women in less egalitarian countries) or focus on how much has been achieved over the last decades and how their group's position has improved (Spoor & Schmitt, 2011). Importantly, such social creativity strategies serve to justify the status quo and legitimize gender inequality. When gender inequality is justified in these ways, it is also likely that collective consciousness about gender inequality will be rather low and the issue of gender discrimination will be unlikely to be politicized (Simon & Klandermans, 2001) because inequalities are perceived as stemming from group *differences* rather than *inequality*. As a result, women's well-being can be protected when social creativity strategies are relied on, even though gender inequality may be seen as legitimate (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998).

Although social creativity strategies or system justification may protect individuals psychologically from the negative consequences of discrimination (Jost & Hunyady, 2002), it is also clear that in societies where exclusively hostile justifications for gender inequality are used (e.g., women are seen as unable to perform in jobs typically held by men), life-satisfaction among both men and women is negatively related to the endorsement of these justifications (Jackman, 1994; Napier, Thorisdottir, & Jost, 2010). Furthermore, Eliezer, Townsend, Sawyer, Major, and Berry Mendes (2011) found that among women who strongly endorsed system-justifying beliefs, there was a positive relationship between perceived discrimination and resting blood pressure (an indicator of chronic stress). Such a relationship was not observed among women who showed lower levels of endorsement of system-justifying beliefs. Thus, it is those who strongly endorse system-justifying beliefs who are most vulnerable when instances of gender discrimination are encountered. Foster, Sloto, and Ruby (2006) found that experiences of personal discrimination led to decreased self-esteem and willingness to engage in collective action only among women who had the strongest belief that meritocracy exists. These researchers also found that only when women reported lower experiences of personal discrimination was the endorsement of meritocracy beliefs associated with increased self-esteem. In sum, this research suggests that it is only when meritocracy beliefs are not challenged by the experience of discrimination that such beliefs effectively protect women's well-being.

### **THE CONSEQUENCES OF LEGITIMACY OF DISCRIMINATION APPRAISALS: WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES**

Appraising discrimination as legitimate or illegitimate should have rather different consequences for women and men. Starting with women's perspectives, and drawing from social identity theory, there is evidence that

perceptions of the legitimacy of status relations moderate responses to low status group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

When discrimination is perceived as illegitimate, group members have a basis on which to challenge the dominant group and rally ingroup members together in solidarity to challenge the threat to identity posed by discrimination. Within minimal groups, there is evidence that when low group status is perceived as having been illegitimately assigned, group identification and willingness to engage in collective action is higher than when the group's low status is seen as legitimate (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993). When faced with illegitimate discrimination, the availability of cognitive alternatives to the existing intergroup situation expands (Reicher & Haslam, 2006; Tajfel, 1978). These conditions provide the possibility of successful attempts at social change and the creation of a positively distinct group identity.

In this way, when gender discrimination is seen as illegitimate, it is also seen as contestable; thus the pressure to change the status quo increases and women, as the disadvantaged group, are more likely to make use of opportunities to directly challenge the majority group (Simon & Klandermans, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Such strategies are particularly favored when group boundaries are perceived to be impermeable. This enhances the likelihood that collective strategies to address gender inequality will be preferred over individual mobility strategies (Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Ellemers et al., 1993; Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In contrast, legitimate negative treatment takes away the cause for action by undermining the validity of the collective grievances of the devalued group (Bylsma, Major, & Cozzarelli, 1995; Major & Testa, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When group members perceive their group's low status as legitimate and deserved, they are more accepting of the status quo than when their group's low status position is seen as illegitimate (Turner & Brown, 1978). Group identification is likely to wane in such situations

and the devalued group will lose its capacity to mobilize the ingroup to engage in collective action because opportunities for challenging the group's negative identity are not available (Drury, Cocking, Beale, Hanson, & Rapley, 2005). In such situations, women will engage in strategies whereby they try to get ahead as individuals (i.e., individual mobility).

Jetten and colleagues (2011) provide some evidence for the detrimental effect of legitimacy appraisals on gender identification and women's willingness to engage in collective action. Among women, pervasive discrimination was found to undermine group commitment when discrimination was appraised as legitimate (compared to when discrimination was appraised as legitimate but rarely occurred). Similar effects were observed on measures assessing women's willingness to engage in mentoring to further collective goals (Hersby, Jetten, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2011). Women who perceived gender discrimination as illegitimate showed enhanced willingness to engage in mentoring when discrimination was seen to be pervasive compared to rare.

There may be additional social consequences of appraising group-based discrimination as legitimate. Both men and women perceive those women who claim to be victims of discrimination as whiners and complainers, and this may be particularly the case when gender discrimination is perceived as relatively legitimate. In this case, when devalued group members do complain, they may be perceived to be avoiding personal responsibility for their negative outcomes (Garcia, Horstman Reser, Amo, Redersdorff, & Branscombe, 2005). In these circumstances, a woman's claim that she is a target of discrimination may threaten ingroup cohesion and could potentially divide the group. However, there is also evidence that women are not always perceived as complainers when they protest against negative treatment. Indeed, Garcia, Schmitt, Branscombe, and Ellemers (2010) showed in two studies that when gender discrimination was perceived to be pervasive, women were more likely to see the complaint by another woman as appropriate, and support

for protesting gender discrimination and liking for the victim was higher compared to when a woman chose not to complain.

It is now clearly established that perceiving illegitimate forms of discrimination as pervasive can have negative well-being consequences in members of stigmatized groups (Branscombe et al., 1999; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2003). However, it is likely that the pathway from perceived discrimination to negative well-being depends on whether or not the discrimination is perceived to be legitimate. First, legitimate discrimination undermines group identification – an important resource for coping with discrimination (the rejection–identification model; see Branscombe et al., 1999; Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001). In addition, legitimate discrimination is associated with different emotions than illegitimate discrimination. Compared to discrimination that is perceived to be legitimate, discrimination that is seen as illegitimate arouses anger (Hansen & Sassenberg, 2006; Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998). Recent work by Hansen and Sassenberg (2011) illustrates the importance of legitimacy perceptions for the emotions experienced by devalued group members. These researchers manipulated the legitimacy of discrimination by providing feedback that the participants' negative outcome was the result of (illegitimate) discrimination or was due to a lack of knowledge (legitimate). Identification with the devalued group was associated with less self-directed anger when discrimination by the majority group was perceived as illegitimate. However, when discrimination was perceived as relatively legitimate, identification was positively related to self-directed anger.

### **THE CONSEQUENCES OF LEGITIMACY OF DISCRIMINATION APPRAISALS: MEN'S PERSPECTIVE**

So far, we have limited our discussion of gender discrimination to women's perceptions and responses to discrimination that is

appraised as legitimate or illegitimate. Men's perceptions about the legitimacy of gender inequality and gender discrimination more specifically can be aligned with women's perceptions, but that is not always the case. Men typically perceive the discrimination that women face as more legitimate than do women (Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006; Miron, Branscombe, & Schmitt, 2006; Miron, Warner, & Branscombe, 2011). This is consistent with theorizing that suggests that, compared to privileged groups, devalued groups are less likely to endorse the view that status-hierarchies and the treatment received by lower status groups are fair (Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002).

Such gender differences in legitimacy perceptions can provide fertile ground for conflict. When women challenge men's view that their treatment is fair, men may perceive this as a status threat and attempt to protect their threatened identity (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Schiffhauer, 2007; Turner & Brown, 1978). Alternatively, when men simply dismiss the claim that the exclusion the devalued group faces is illegitimate, it is likely that the women will be frustrated because their grievances have fallen on deaf ears. The tension that results may lead to further polarization of the groups and increase the likelihood that the women will resort to collective action. To understand how collective action can emerge over time, there is a need for research examining the dynamics between men and women in the formation of legitimacy perceptions.

When discussing antecedents and consequences of gender discrimination, researchers typically assess discrimination targeting women, not men. Even though this practice might not be surprising, it is interesting to note that the number of men claiming they have been victimized by gender discrimination is on the rise. While men filed 8% of all sexual harassment complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in the United States in 1990, this increased to 16% in 2009 (with a total of 19.7% of all sex-based charges being filed by men in 2009; see Greenwald, 2010). One reason given for this

increase is that the historically advantaged group perceives the implementation of affirmative action programs for women as threatening their group's position and reducing the privileges men have historically been accorded (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997). Despite the fact that instances of gender discrimination reported by men are typically of lower severity than those reported by women (Branscombe, 1998), these statistics highlight the need to gain greater insight into the circumstances under which men claim to be victims of gender discrimination. Recent research has found that such 'competitive victimization' claims are offered by historically dominant groups precisely when their own group's harmful actions toward the disadvantaged group are made salient (Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012).

The limited research that has been conducted suggests that men, as the historically advantaged gender group, respond quite differently to gender discrimination experiences than do women (Kobrynowicz & Branscombe, 1997). For example, men's well-being is unrelated to perceptions of discrimination (Schmitt et al., 2002), presumably because gender discrimination against males is relatively rare and unexpected. Branscombe (1998) found that men's self-esteem increased after thinking about the disadvantages they experience based on their gender (compared to a condition where they were asked to reflect on the privileges they experience because of their gender). Finally, there is evidence that when men construed gender discrimination against women as more legitimate because gender differences are, for example, seen as biologically determined (e.g., women being physically weaker makes them less suited for particular professions), they felt less guilt about the gender discrimination their group perpetrates (Miron et al., 2006). In sum, men respond differently than women to the experience of gender discrimination. The differences can largely be explained by considering the differing status positions that men and women occupy within the broader social structure. Men (as the

advantaged gender group) are less threatened than women (the historically disadvantaged gender group) by gender discrimination because gender discrimination is not a structural barrier to getting ahead for men compared to women.

### **Directions for Future Research**

This review of gender discrimination research makes clear that perceptions of the legitimacy of gender discrimination have changed considerably across time. These changing legitimacy perceptions need to be taken into account when examining the extent to which women and men believe they face gender discrimination, as well as their responses to such discrimination. However, what is clear is that while there is much research on illegitimate gender discrimination, very little is known about when victims of gender discrimination will appraise their negative group-based treatment as legitimate, how legitimacy appraisals change over time, and the consequences of such appraisals for behavior.

We expect that perceiving group discrimination as legitimate will be associated with *hidden costs* for targets who do so. This is because, in contrast to illegitimate forms of discrimination, (a) victims of legitimate discrimination often do not recognize the discriminatory treatment they encounter as group-based (DePaulo, 2006), and (b) those facing legitimate discrimination may not be willing to publicly identify themselves as suffering from discrimination because they fear being described as 'whiners' (Garcia et al., 2005, 2010), and may encounter severe reprisals when they do so. In addition, collective coping responses are likely to be cut off when people who face discrimination perceive it as legitimate. Inability to gain protection by seeking solace from others who share their disadvantage can result from either not recognizing the group-based nature of their exclusion, or from a fear of reprisals for claiming such exclusion to be unjust. As a result, negative treatment is perceived as an individual level problem and group members may not receive

and benefit from social support by other group members (Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2011).

Moreover, when gender discrimination is perceived as legitimate, it is likely to prevent social change because disadvantaged group members' willingness to engage in collective action will be undermined. These processes are critical to gaining a full understanding of how people experience, and cope with, group-based exclusion. Future research should not only uncover the hidden costs of legitimate discrimination at the individual and collective level, but can improve our understanding of the consequences of group-based discrimination.

## CONCLUSIONS

Gender discrimination is not simply a problem of the past; women still face considerable disadvantage in many aspects of life compared to their male counterparts. What has changed over recent decades is the perceived legitimacy of the exclusion of women on the basis of their gender. Many forms of gender discrimination that were once perceived as perfectly legitimate (e.g., a woman losing her job when she marries) are now perceived as illegitimate by women and men alike. Nevertheless, and despite the progress that has been made, legitimate forms of gender discrimination still exist and it may not only be men, but women too, who perceive exclusion on the basis of gender as legitimate (e.g., not allowing women to become priests).

While researchers have focused on eradicating illegitimate forms of gender discrimination, there has been much less attention directed toward understanding when differential treatment is perceived as legitimate. This is unfortunate because legitimate discrimination can have pernicious effects on psychological well-being and may prevent social change (Brandt, 2011). Because responses to forms of gender discrimination that are perceived as legitimate differ from responses to gender discrimination that are perceived as illegitimate, practically speaking, an understanding of the appraisals, emotions, and

actions associated with legitimate discrimination can help devise strategies to build broader awareness about the consequences of such gender discrimination.

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# Coping with the Stress of Gender Discrimination

Kimberly Matheson and Mindi D. Foster

## INTRODUCTION

When women encounter discrimination they might express any number of reactions:

'What discrimination? I don't think it was meant that way.'

'You have to have a sense of humor, and not get uptight about things.'

'Sometimes you have to ignore it, or people start thinking that you're just an angry feminist.'

'It makes me so angry ... I just have to do something about it so that it can't keep happening to women.'

While vastly different, each of these reactions could potentially represent an adaptive strategy for contending with gender discrimination. Even as individuals derive psychological and social benefits from their group memberships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), when such groups are socially disadvantaged, the discriminatory actions of others represent a source of distress (Klonoff, Landrine, & Campbell, 2000; Swim, Cohen, & Hyers, 1998). Gender discrimination

comprises a range of behaviors, including ongoing (chronic) day-to-day hassles to more severe instances of blatant rejection and exclusion, or even traumatic assault. As with other stressors, discriminatory experiences may culminate in stress-related illnesses. For instance, members of stigmatized or otherwise socially devalued groups (e.g., women, blacks, gays, First Nations people) suffer disproportionately from adverse psychological (depression, PTSD) and physiological disturbances (immune disturbances, diabetes, cardiovascular problems), even after adjusting for age or socioeconomic status (Clark, 2003; Gee, 2002; George & Lynch, 2003; Klonoff et al., 2000; Schulz et al., 2000). Indeed, women, as well as members of other devalued groups, demonstrate relatively high prevalence rates worldwide for a number of stress-related disorders (World Health Organization, 2011).

Of course, inter-individual variation exists among women, stemming in part from differences in objective experiences of discrimination, along with subjective appraisals, coping strategies, and resources available to contend with the situation (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Matheson & Anisman, 2009; Miller &

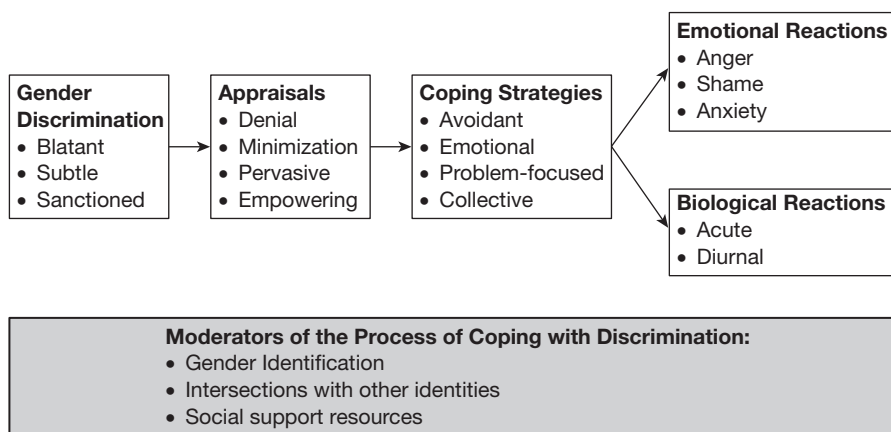
Kaiser, 2001). Under most conditions, the coping strategies elicited to respond to potentially stressful circumstances are relatively effective in diminishing the threat, and maintaining or restoring well-being. However, if the situation is beyond the individual's ability to manage appropriately, biological coping systems may become overly taxed (referred to as allostatic overload; McEwen, 2000), rendering the individual more vulnerable to the development of stress-related illnesses.

In this chapter, we will use the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), along with tenets of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to understand women's response to discrimination. Events that constitute threats to women's social identity can be considered to constitute potential stressors. As we depict in Figure 20.1, according to the transactional model, when a threat such as gender discrimination is encountered, its impact will be dependent upon women's appraisals and coping resources. Essentially, when individuals encounter a potentially threatening situation, they engage in risk assessment (determining what is at stake), and evaluate coping resources and options. Different coping efforts may be employed concurrently or sequentially (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005; Lazarus, 2000; Tennen, Affleck, Armeli, & Carney, 2000),

and their effectiveness can depend on the situation (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Cheng, 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Matheson & Anisman, 2003, 2009). In recent years, appraisal theories of emotion have been incorporated into this model, wherein particular emotions are elicited as a function of appraisals, and these emotions are also linked to action propensities (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). Finally, several physiological changes occur that serve multiple functions essential to well-being. Like emotional responses, biological changes associated with encountering stressors are influenced by psychosocial factors (e.g., gender identification, past experiences) and appraisal-coping processes, and they may, in turn, influence a woman's capacity to deal effectively with discrimination.

## GENDER DISCRIMINATION AS A STRESSOR

Although some might believe that gender discrimination is negligible in present-day society, North American women have documented that they personally experienced or witnessed discrimination on a fairly common basis. In particular, in diary studies, which reduce recall bias, conducted over two- (Swim et al., 2001)



**Figure 20.1** Theoretical model delineating stress and coping process elicited when women encounter gender discrimination, including the moderating effects of aspects of gender identification



and four-week periods (Foster, 2009), women reported one to three sexist incidents per week, with over half of these representing personal experiences (Foster, 2009; Hyers, 2007; Swim et al., 2001). As Barreto and Ellemers (Chapter 18 this volume) note, gender discrimination comprises a range of behaviors, including ongoing (chronic) day-to-day hassles to more severe instances of blatant, even traumatic discrimination. The various features of discrimination will influence how it is appraised by the target, and the resources and responses available to her to cope with it.

As the behaviors that constitute 'old fashioned' prejudice are widely regarded as unacceptable, prejudice has evolved to be more subtle or 'modern' (Ellemers & Barreto, 2009; Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995). Differences in these forms of prejudice typically revolve around the issue of intent, the explicit devaluation of women, and whether or not the attitude is couched in terms of more acceptable social values. Far from being eradicated from Western society, the continued sexual harassment and violence against women, pornography, domestic abuse, lack of reproductive rights, and so on, are rooted in the objectification of women that renders them subordinate to men (see Grabe, Chapter 25 this volume).

We might argue that as a society such attitudes and behaviors are deemed unacceptable. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that we continue to turn the other way when women are raped (Zurbriggen, 2010), to revictimize women who report sexual assault (Temkin & Krahe, 2008), or see women as complicit in their own abuse (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan, 2010). As long as this occurs, we can hardly claim that old-fashioned sexism is no longer with us. Indeed, empirical assessment of the extent to which people endorse a social hierarchy that values men more than women indicates that acceptance of systemic gender discrimination is alive and well (Pratto & Walker, 2004). The persistence of such blatant discrimination experiences, combined with their severity, unpredictability, and victim-blaming, ensures that women continue to

encounter traumatic and devastating stressor experiences that serve to test their psychological resilience.

More modern forms of discrimination might acknowledge that women's outcomes are disadvantageous relative to men's, but adhere to ideologies that appeal to socially valued constructs, such as merit, choice, and division of labor, that have the effect of maintaining women's disadvantaged status. For example, opposition to affirmative action programs involves arguments regarding the primacy of merit, and assumptions that equal treatment is sufficient to provide equal opportunities (see Crosby, Sabatini, & Aizawa, Chapter 29 this volume). The notion of benevolent sexism involves celebrating women's traditional feminine attributes as essential to their being (Glick & Fiske, 2001), and microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) can involve praise 'despite being a woman'. Because these behaviors are consistent with sanctioned social values, or are ambiguous with respect to negative intent, it can make it difficult for women to define such situations as discriminatory (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005).

Some forms of discrimination are arguably even sanctioned. Women continue to hold primary responsibility for child care (Williams, 2001), and are more likely to be single parents (US Census Bureau, 2009). Thus, the stress associated with work-home balance, along with disadvantaged financial status and limited career progression associated with having a family, are more relevant to women, a phenomenon that has been labelled 'the maternal wall' (Crosby, Williams, & Beirnat, 2004). Women are also more likely to take responsibility for the care of elderly parents (Stephens & Franks, 2009). These situations might not be regarded as constituting discrimination, as they presumably reflect women's choices (Crosby et al., 2004). Yet, they place women in a disadvantaged social and economic position, and add to the stress that women experience on an ongoing basis.

Finally, one cannot assume that discrimination is experienced in the same manner by

all women. The 'double jeopardy hypothesis' (Beale, 1979) suggests that gender discrimination can be compounded by experiences arising from additional disadvantaged group memberships based on, for example, ethnicity, age, size, religion, social class, and so on. The effects of belonging to multiple disadvantaged groups may be additive, as ethnic minority women report more harassment at work (Berdahl & Moore, 2006), more discrimination in higher education (Rodriguez, 2008), and are subject to greater stereotype threat (Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002) than white women, white men and ethnic minority men. However, as we discuss later, these varying experiences may also translate into qualitatively different experiences as a result of variations of minority women's appraisals of, and means of coping with, discrimination.

## APPRAISAL PROCESSES

In the face of experiences that challenge our personal and social standing, we typically seek strategies for diminishing the extent to which stress, or more precisely, distress is induced. This can entail taking a hard look at the reasons for the event, including appraisals of whether it was due to our personal shortcomings, or whether other factors came into play that allow us to discount the importance or relevance of the event to the self. It has been argued that if individuals appraise their experience as reflecting discrimination, they are less likely to attribute it to their own deficiencies, and hence, their self-esteem is buffered (Crocker & Major, 1994; Major & O'Brien, 2005).

However, a robust phenomenon, namely the personal-group discrimination discrepancy, demonstrates that even when there is objective information pointing to discrimination, women will deny or minimize the likelihood that discrimination was the reason for their negative outcome (Crosby, 1984; Foster & Matheson, 1999). Reinforcing such a strategy of denial are powerful social norms

against claims of discrimination (e.g., playing the 'sex card'), because it challenges the merit-based foundation of our society (Garcia, Horstman Reser, Amo, Redersdorff, & Branscombe, 2005; Kaiser, 2007). This situation is particularly poignant for women, as their lives are highly intertwined with those of the outgroup (men) within the context of families, friends, and intimate partners.

Discrimination events often entail attributional ambiguity (Major, Quinton, & Schmader, 2003) and uncertainty about the pervasiveness of discriminatory biases. As a result, motivational factors might well come into play to influence how women appraise such events, as such appraisals have implications for subsequent well-being. On the one hand, if women's negative treatment is attributed to their own personal character flaws, they may self-blame and ultimately this challenges self-esteem (Major et al., 2003). On the other hand, acknowledging discrimination that is severe or pervasive can elicit feelings of helplessness, shame and anxiety (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Matheson & Anisman, 2009; Stroebe, Dovidio, Barreto, Ellemers, & John, 2011). However, such distress might be mitigated if resources are available to respond collectively to the situation and to challenge the status quo. Perhaps for this reason, when individuals identified more strongly with their group membership, they were more likely to acknowledge discrimination (Operario & Fiske, 2001) and, conversely, when women were the targets of discrimination, identification with their group strengthened (Schmitt, Branscombe, Kobrynowicz, & Owen, 2002). Group identification and consciousness might provide a basis for perceiving the availability of social resources to contend with such experiences (Branscombe et al., 1999; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Outten, Schmitt, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009). In this regard, the relation between appraisals and coping is a dynamic one, in that women's capacity to effectively cope may influence their appraisals of the extent to which the situation constitutes discrimination.

Although women may share common experiences of sexism, unlike visible minority women, Euro-Caucasian women have advantages associated with *white privilege* that may provide opportunities and resources that allow them to more effectively respond to the threat of discrimination. In this regard, women who are in a position to confront the situation may be better positioned to recognize it. Yet, it is women who experience multiple forms of discrimination (e.g., due to sexism, racism, religion) who are more likely to appraise otherwise ambiguous situations as discriminatory (Klonoff, Landrine, & Scott, 1995), and unfortunately, such experiences have a more pronounced negative impact on these women's health and well-being (Guyll, Matthews, & Bromberger, 2001; Schulz et al., 2000). It is possible that repeated exposure to discrimination in multiple forms not only increases perceived pervasiveness of discrimination, but is also associated with more limited resources to cope with it.

## COPING STRATEGIES

A broad range of specific methods can be used to cope with stressors but, for the sake of simplicity, are often considered under the broad categories of problem-focused (e.g., social-support seeking, problem-solving), emotion-focused (e.g., emotional expression, rumination), and avoidant efforts (e.g., distraction, disengagement, withdrawal). Each of these strategies might be expressed through a variety of actions, and may serve multiple functions that vary across situations (e.g., social-support seeking in an effort to distract oneself, as a component of problem-solving, or a form of emotional expression) and across time in response to a given event (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005; Tennen et al., 2000). For example, when a woman encounters discrimination, emotion-focused efforts might be initially used to manage her emotional reactions (e.g., to contain anger), thereby facilitating subsequent problem-focused

efforts (Matheson & Anisman, 2009). Or strategies may change as women come to recognize that their experience is shared and pervasive. In this regard, when women perceive discrimination events as pervasive, they initially report greater behavioral disengagement than problem-solving, but over time, are more likely to report problem-solving and less likely to endorse disengagement (Foster, 2009). Also, coping with discrimination can operate at the level of the individual (e.g., blame oneself for 'letting it happen'), involve a shared ingroup response (e.g., women create their own network of support), or might entail intergroup strategies (e.g., challenging the status quo) (Outten et al., 2009).

Although individuals may have particular coping propensities or styles (e.g., the person who constantly ruminates into the night when she is trying to solve a problem), the strategies that individuals adopt to contend with a stressor are influenced by situational appraisals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When the situation is appraised as controllable, efforts may be made to alter the course of events through problem-solving; however, perceiving control may be most likely among individuals who typically adopt a problem-solving orientation. If the stressor is seen to be enduring and unchangeable, emotion-focused coping strategies might prevail in order to diminish one's feelings of distress, although the reverse may also be true, in that an emotion-focused orientation can result in greater sensitivity to stressors and their inevitable consequences (Stanton & Franz, 1999).

The particular appraisals that are linked to various coping strategies may further vary as a function of women's ethnic group membership. For example, when we primed women to think about a discrimination event in a laboratory experiment, women's ethnic group membership interacted with their appraisals of discrimination to differentially influence their coping strategies (Foster, 2005). Specifically, among ethnic minority women, greater perceived pervasiveness of discrimination was associated with greater acceptance (e.g., 'I've been learning to live with it'), as

well as greater reliance on religious faith. In contrast, among white women, greater appraisals of the event as controllable predicted more active problem-solving coping (e.g., 'I've been taking action to try to make the situation better'), a relation that was not evident among ethnic minority women. Thus, not only did the strategies for coping with gender discrimination vary as a function of ethnicity, but the appraisal dimensions that elicited particular coping strategies differed. Whereas ethnic minority women's coping was most attuned to the perceived pervasiveness of discrimination, white women's coping was linked to their appraisals of control.

The effectiveness of various forms of coping also depends on their co-occurrence with other psychological responses. In this regard, the role of cognitive restructuring, or 'social creativity' (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which entails redefining a negative situation by deriving positive meaning or benefit, is especially relevant. For example, in a national survey of women, among those who reported an experience of discrimination but did *not* report distress, cognitive restructuring was accompanied by emotional expression ('I was really upset, but I'll know better next time') (Matheson & Anisman, 2012). In contrast, among women who acknowledged discrimination and reported distress, cognitive restructuring was highly related to self-blame. This, combined with the endorsement of a problem-solving strategy for coping with such events, suggested that these latter women construed the experience as one that they ought to be able to control, 'if only I was a stronger person'. However, the combination of strategies that were employed varied as a function of women's ethnicity. Among white women, both problem-solving and cognitive restructuring were *negatively* linked to avoidant coping strategies, whereas among ethnic minority women, problem-solving and cognitive restructuring were *positively* associated with avoidant strategies, which were further associated with social-support seeking. Use of avoidant strategies among minority women reflected a

collective response that seemed to be consciously employed to diminish the potential impact of discrimination.

## EMOTIONAL AND BIOLOGICAL REACTIONS

Emotional and physiological reactions can influence appraisals of a discrimination event, as well as the coping strategies that are elicited (Gill & Matheson, 2006; Matheson & Anisman, 2009). However, as these reactions are also managed by appraisal and coping processes, they are often considered to be the outcomes that are most proximally related to long-term health and well-being.

### *Emotional Reactions*

Discrimination is associated with a range of emotions, with the most common being anger, sadness, shame, and anxiety. The specific emotional reactions are dependent on how the situation is appraised and a woman's perceived capacity to cope effectively with it. If a situation is recognized as discriminatory and unjust, and an effective response is perceived as possible, then a sense of outrage (anger) may evolve (Kappen & Branscombe, 2001; van Zomeren, Spear, Fischer, & Leach, 2004). In the context of discrimination, anger may be an adaptive response, acting as a catalyst for actions to counter discrimination (Yzerbyt, Dumond, Wigboldus, & Gordijn, 2003). This might be especially the case among women with a strong gender identity (Fischer, Haslam, & Smith, 2010; Yzerbyt et al., 2003), or when they perceive that other women are similarly angered by the situation (Leonard, Moons, Mackie, & Smith, 2011). Anger also signals that an appraisal of the situation as illegitimate and unfair is appropriate, and that a woman's claim of sexism is credible (Matheson, Raspopow, & Anisman, 2012).

Despite this, the expression of anger is often perceived as socially inappropriate, and indeed, anger is almost universally regarded as a 'destructive' emotion (Trierweiler, Eid,

& Lischetzke, 2002). Considerable pressure exists to regulate or contain anger among members of minority groups, especially in the presence of dominant group members who control resources (Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). There are also gender-based expectations wherein women are discouraged from expressing anger, and are treated punitively by both men and women when they do (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Social expectations to suppress anger might undermine women's sense of control or efficacy, and hence attenuate the likelihood of endorsing actions to directly contend with the situation, although inaction may be associated with some degree of resentment (Gill & Matheson, 2006; Louis & Taylor, 1999). Moreover, the incongruence between the act of suppression and the activating properties of anger may result in considerable distress (Butler et al., 2003; Foster, 2011). To reduce this distress under socially constrained conditions, women may be motivated to minimize appraisals of discrimination, or adopt coping strategies to manage their emotional responses (Matheson & Anisman, 2009).

As noted earlier, discrimination outcomes are often ambiguous as to whether the event was due to group membership or to personal attributes. To the extent that discrimination is associated with perceptions that the event is caused by internal characteristics (e.g., personal deservingness), or is viewed as pervasive (stable and global), feelings of helplessness, self-blame and poor psychological well-being may be elicited (Branscombe et al., 1999; Foster, 2001; Schmitt, Branscombe, & Postmes, 2003). Perhaps because weak gender identification diminishes the salience of the intergroup factors at the root of the experience, women with a weak gender identity are most prone to sadness following discrimination (Crisp, Hueston, Farr, & Turner, 2007).

In contrast, when group membership is considered an integral part of the self-concept, discrimination may be perceived as pervasive rejection, accompanied by a sense of inferiority and an inability to live up to standards, which promotes feelings of shame (Ferguson,

Eyre, & Ashbaker, 2000; Matheson & Anisman, 2009). Unlike the other-blame attributions associated with anger, shame conveys a belief that one has personally failed to fulfill important social norms and expectations (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Even when individuals do not perceive their treatment to be legitimate, shame might be experienced simply because one's status has been undermined in the eyes of others (Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002). When discrimination elicits shame, women's responses may reflect withdrawal, submission, and appeasement, rather than confrontation (Matheson & Anisman, 2009).

Anxiety, or fear, is an emotion that is more likely to be experienced in anticipation of an event, and in particular, is elicited by expectations of rejection (Barlow, Louis, & Terry, 2010). Similarly, stereotype threat is found to elicit anxiety due to group members' concerns about confirming negative stereotypes about themselves, often resulting in performance deficits (Inzlicht & Ben Zeev, 2000), or strategies to avoid the situation or members of the outgroup (Barlow et al., 2010). Feelings of anxiety might also be elicited depending on the actions women took to respond to a discriminatory event. Specifically, women may feel anxious about possible repercussions of their behavior (Miller, Cronin, Garcia, & Branscombe, 2009), or alternatively might feel angry at themselves if they regretted their response (Kedia & Hilton, 2011).

Women's emotional reactions can also vary as a function of women's ethnic group membership, in that white women who accepted discrimination but were dissatisfied with that decision showed decreasing positive mood and mastery over time, whereas ethnic minority women who were accepting showed increasing happiness, self-esteem, and sense of purpose and decreasing sadness (Foster, 2010). This is consistent with the pattern of findings previously noted wherein ethnic minority women who recognized the pervasiveness of discrimination were more inclined to turn to religious faith, and for whom avoidant coping co-occurred with



social-support seeking, problem-solving, and cognitive restructuring ('finding the silver lining'). Once again, it would appear that the responses to discrimination that promote well-being among ethnic minority women are qualitatively different from those that benefit white women.

### ***Biological Reactions***

Stressors elicit several biological changes that are integrally linked to appraisals, coping responses, and emotions. Of these, the best known and most widely studied concerns activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. The end product of this activation, namely, that of cortisol release, activates other stress responses, acts in a preparatory capacity to deal with further or impending stressors, or limits responses that might otherwise be harmful or counterproductive (Sapolsky, Romero, & Munck, 2000). Cortisol and other hormones (such as gonadal hormones) interact with one another, as well as with central neuronal processes, and thus affect numerous behavioral and biological outputs (e.g., eating and metabolic processes, cognitive functioning). In addition, stressors influence brain neurotransmitters and growth factors that have been implicated in mood states, cognitive functioning, and coping efforts (Anisman, Merali, & Hayley, 2008).

Two approaches have been used to assess cortisol reactions to stressors. The first, a laboratory procedure, assesses cortisol levels in response to an acute stressor challenge. The most common paradigm is known as the Trier Social Stress Test, which involves public speaking to a small panel of judges coupled with a verbal arithmetic test (Kirschbaum, Pirke, & Hellhammer, 1993). Such laboratory stressors typically promote an increase of cortisol that is evident in blood or saliva within 15 minutes and returns to basal levels at about one hour. Although not all stressors elicit cortisol changes, a meta-analysis indicated that uncontrollable social-evaluative threats (e.g., involving

rejection, an unwanted or stigmatizing identity made salient) were particularly effective in provoking cortisol elevations, accounting for 26% of the variance across studies, in comparison to situations in which such features were not present, such as motivated performance tasks that did not involve evaluation (Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004).

Gender discrimination can also be simulated within a laboratory context to evaluate women's behavioral and biological response to such events. We found that when women were exposed to a challenge that involved a blatant discrimination event (i.e., rejection and failure in task performance attributed to gender), this experience did not necessarily result in an increase of cortisol relative to other stressors, such as performance failure due to ability (see also Page-Gould, Mendes, & Major, 2010). Rather, cortisol elevations were dependent upon women's appraisals, as well as their emotional and coping responses. For example, women reporting greater shame following discrimination showed higher and more sustained cortisol levels (Matheson & Anisman, 2009), as did women who were angered (Matheson, Gill, Kelly, & Anisman, 2008). However, when women were angry and employed problem-focused coping efforts, the rise of cortisol levels was limited (Matheson & Anisman, 2009). This might mean that the coping strategies that women employ to channel their anger into constructive actions that could potentially change the status quo may diminish negative physiological effects that might otherwise be evident. Indeed, women who reported higher levels of discrimination (pervasive discrimination) showed acute cortisol elevations when directly confronting a discriminatory situation (Townsend, Major, Gangi, & Mendes, 2011), perhaps because efforts to respond to a given situation may not be expected to have lasting or broad effects. Likewise, individuals who distanced themselves from a stigmatized group identity following discrimination (a form of avoidant coping) also showed higher cortisol reactivity (Matheson & Cole, 2004). It is possible that these participants

found the situation especially aversive, and distancing themselves from the group was their coping strategy to minimize negative affect. Alternatively, individuals who did not identify with the group might not have perceived themselves as having social resources that would help them to cope effectively, and hence experienced the situation as more stressful.

A second approach used to assess cortisol responses in relation to stressful life events entails the analysis of diurnal changes. Circulating cortisol levels ordinarily rise markedly over the first 30 min following awakening (40% is typically measured in saliva) and then begin a decline that diminishes by late afternoon and reaches the nadir near midnight (Schmidt-Reinwald et al., 1999). A meta-analysis revealed that chronic stressors were particularly likely to result in exaggerated morning cortisol elevations, although it was also noted that if the stressor was sufficiently protracted and intense, then the diurnal cortisol variations were blunted. However, chronicity was often confounded with controllability and the type of stressor experienced, making the relative contributions of these stressor features difficult to discern (Michaud, Matheson, Kelly, & Anisman, 2008).

Variations in morning cortisol levels are also evident as a function of coping strategies. For example, in a sample of Canadian ethnic minority women contending with gender discrimination, lower morning cortisol elevations were associated with greater use of problem-solving coping strategies (see Matheson, Jorden, & Anisman, 2008). However, neither emotion-focused nor avoidant strategies in response to gender discrimination were predictive of the morning cortisol rise among white or ethnic minority women exposed to gender discrimination on a persistent basis (e.g., encountered higher than average frequencies of verbal denigration, denial of equal opportunities, exclusion). Rather, women's emotional coping strategies were only protective when they did not perceive themselves to be a constant

target of gender discrimination, wherein the morning cortisol rise was diminished among ethnic minority women inclined to emotionally express themselves, or among white women who were disinclined to adopt avoidant strategies. Although we have suggested in other sections that there might be beneficial effects of adopting avoidant or minimization strategies among ethnic minority women, the relation between more expressive strategies and lower morning cortisol suggests that the effectiveness of various strategies for coping are quite complex. Indeed, Afro-Caribbean women who internalized racist views were more likely to adopt avoidant coping strategies, and these women demonstrated greater dysregulation of the diurnal cortisol pattern (Tull, Sheu, Butler, & Cornelious, 2005). Perhaps such avoidant strategies are only effective when supported by an interpretive framework that enables ethnic minority women to maintain collective esteem and empowerment.

## **PSYCHOSOCIAL BUFFERS: IDENTITY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT RESOURCES**

Clearly, the impact of discrimination on a woman's emotions and stress-related biological outcomes is influenced by the nature of the event, her appraisals of the event, and coping strategies that she is able to enact. Numerous factors serve to alter the stress process by providing personal and social resources to confront the situation. In the context of discrimination, women's gender identification, along with her social support resources may moderate the stress response.

### ***Gender Identification***

The strength of identification individuals have with their social group is regarded as one of the most important variables influencing how they behave in an intergroup context (Fischer et al., 2010). Despite the fact that individuals who report high identification with a salient group may be sensitive to a

threat to that identity (Major et al., 2003), they experience the *least* depression or loss of self-esteem following such a threat (Branscombe et al., 1999; Jetten, Branscombe, Schmitt, & Spears, 2001). A primary benefit of a strong social identity is the support provided by other members of the group (Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005; Matheson & Anisman, 2012). However, the role of gender identification may be more complex, given its multiple components, multiple meanings, and the extent to which gender identification interacts with other social and personal identities.

There are three dimensions of group identification that are commonly considered and are distinct in the role they play for members' capacity to deal with discrimination (Cameron, 2004; Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Tajfel, 1978). These include cognitive awareness of group membership and its importance to the self-concept (centrality), the value ascribed to group membership (ingroup affect or pride), and members' emotional involvement or attachment with other group members (ingroup ties). There is evidence that ingroup affect and ties have protective effects against the adverse impact of discrimination on a range of variables, such as self-esteem (Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006) and depressive symptoms (Mossakowski, 2003). Although there are some indications that identity centrality might also serve in a protective capacity (Chavous, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, & Cogburn, 2008), the majority of these studies used measures of centrality that included items assessing ingroup ties. In fact, when measured as a distinct construct, centrality of identity was related to group members being *more* vulnerable to the negative effects of discrimination (McCoy & Major, 2003). Indeed, when an identity is central to individuals' self-concepts, it may result in greater vigilance and sensitivity to discriminatory behaviors (Operario & Fiske, 2001), and those for whom their group identity is central may be more likely to care when their group experiences discrimination (Petta & Walker, 1992).

The meaning of gender identification can also vary, and in particular when it is understood in relation to feminist or political consciousness. Identification and consciousness are independent constructs (Gurin & Markus, 1989). A woman may report strong ingroup affect and ingroup ties, but still not endorse an ideology that characterizes a politicized feminist consciousness. Such political consciousness entails not only a sense that one's fate is tied to that of the group and discontent with the lack of power of the group, but also the belief that power differences are systemic and that change requires collective action (Duncan, 1999; Gurin & Markus, 1989). Self-labelled feminists take more collective action to change the status of women as a group than do non-labellers (Duncan, 2010; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010), including women who identify with the group 'women' (Henderson-King & Stewart, 1994), and who have egalitarian attitudes (Zucker, 2004). Feminist self-labelling embodies a more politicized identity than gender identification alone, as it involves a conscious decision to take on an unpopular identity (the 'F' word), and to embrace a political and sometimes confrontational action agenda (Duncan, 1999; Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2011). Indeed, when feminists point to discrimination, their claims are especially likely to be discounted by women and men alike (Roy, Weibust, & Miller, 2009). Our own data indicate that when women encounter discrimination in the presence of a female friend who shares their political ideology, they are more likely to recognize the experience as discriminatory, and at the same time, to report less stress, especially when they are higher in gender identification (Takacs, 2011). It is possible that when women have a common understanding of the situation and an 'us versus them' framework is employed, this encourages appraisals that discrimination has occurred but also that it can be responded to effectively. Perhaps because of the greater sense of control and efficacy such a decision reflects, a stronger feminist identity is also related to better health and well-being (Yakushko, 2007; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010).

The protective capacity of gender identification might also depend on the extent to which women are a target of discrimination due to belonging to other disadvantaged groups. Indeed, among ethnic minority women, there is a positive correlation between encountering sexist and racist events, although it was the sexist rather than racist events that were associated with lower well-being among ethnic minority women (Remedios, Chasteen, & Paek, 2012; Settles, 2006). It is possible that when racial discrimination was encountered, the resources associated with women's ethnic identity were perceived as more relevant and salient, and as such, ethnic identity was a source of resilience. Yet, there is evidence to suggest that high levels of ethnic identity are more influential in protecting well-being among minority males, rather than females (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010; Gaylord-Harden, Ragsdale, Mandara, Richards, & Petersen, 2007). In contrast, black women with a stronger ethnic or 'womanist' consciousness (the integration of feminist and ethnic consciousness) were more likely to report that an event constituted discrimination, and that it was central to their identity (King, 2003a). Further, attributing the event to racism or the combination of racism and sexism was associated with greater stress and reduced self-esteem (King, 2003b). Thus, it appears that the effects of discrimination as a result of multiple group identities are not straightforward, and it cannot be assumed that the resilience associated with group identification among individuals at the intersection will be evident.

Although women's identity intersects with other social identities, it can also be considered in relation to other personal and interpersonal identities. Of particular importance in this regard is the fact that although women are members of a distinct social group, they are unique in the extent to which their lives are intertwined with the 'dominant' group – men (including husbands, brothers, fathers, etc.). This contributes to a strong motivational basis to maximize intergroup harmony,

and minimize the extent to which behaviors that maintain women's disadvantaged status are regarded as discriminatory (Jackman, 1994).

The close integration and interdependence of women with men means that women will often turn to male companions for support when they encounter situations that might be construed as discrimination. The challenge with this is that when the primary source of women's support is male, an intergroup framework threatens the dyadic identity; if adopted, it translates into 'me versus you', as her male supporter belongs to the group that has perpetrated the injustice. To eliminate tension from the interpersonal realm, the event might not be appraised as reflecting systemic discrimination, but instead as the isolated act of a specific individual. Such an appraisal would serve to protect a woman's male source of support from being viewed as 'one of them.' Consistent with this, when women were exposed to a discriminatory online blog in the presence of their intimate male partners, they were less likely to appraise it as such (in comparison to when they were with a female friend), but that this only occurred among women whose gender identification was weak (Takacs, 2011).

### ***Social Support Resources***

Ingroup support is more likely to be perceived by individuals with a strong sense of shared identity with the group (Haslam et al., 2005). Such support may buffer individuals from being an isolated target of negative stereotypes (Brewer, 1991), minimize feelings of rejection (Schmitt et al., 2003), reduce distress (Haslam et al., 2005), facilitate a collective response (Louis & Taylor, 1999), and provide a sense of meaning and coherence that facilitates coping (Szymanski & Chung, 2003).

Although social support might be available to contend with discrimination, support responses may depend on whether or not the reactions of the victim are perceived to be behaviorally and emotionally appropriate. In this regard, support for confronting a situation

is more likely to be forthcoming when the event is blatantly discriminatory (Dodd, Guiliano, Boutell, & Moran, 2001), or when gender discrimination is perceived to be pervasive (Garcia, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Ellemers, 2010). The victim's emotional reaction, however, may influence the extent to which she receives support. As noted earlier, anger may serve as a catalyst for other members of the group to become involved (Yzerbyt et al., 2003). However, the expression of anger may result in women being treated punitively by both men and women (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Indeed, when a female expressed an emotional reaction to a situation of discrimination, this was interpreted by other women and men as reflecting a lack of control and higher likelihood of responding emotionally, rather than rationally, to the situation (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008; Matheson et al., 2012; Moons & Mackie, 2007). This said, women's expression of anger served to legitimize their claims of discrimination, at least among outgroup members (Matheson et al., 2012). In effect, when a victim's emotions are not congruent with expectations, others are less likely to have confidence that she was reliable or blameless (Kaufman, Drevland, Wessel, Overskied, & Magnussen, 2003).

The response of others when women seek support is critical, not only in terms of providing a coping resource, but also has broader implications for a woman's trust in others. In this regard, an especially important component of social support involves experiences of *unsupport*. This does not simply refer to the absence of support, but refers to occasions when others are unwilling to provide support when it was reasonably expected or when others are insensitive to the individual's needs (e.g., 'well, you brought it on yourself', 'maybe you're just being overly sensitive'). Such encounters may result in adverse consequences beyond those engendered when support was simply perceived as unavailable in the first place. Unsupportive interactions have been linked to reduced psychological well-being, over and above the perceived unavailability of social support, or

the effects of the stressor experience itself (Song & Ingram, 2002), and have been associated to greater depressive and anxiety symptoms associated with discrimination (Jorden, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009). When we asked a large community sample of women about the nature of the support they received when they encountered a situation of discrimination, perceived support was not a significant predictor of well-being, whereas encountering unsupportive responses from either men or women had a considerable impact on depressive symptoms (Matheson & Anisman, 2012). Anticipation of unsupportive reactions from others might also contribute to the tendency to deny or minimize the situation, and to employ avoidant coping strategies.

## CONCLUSION

Gender discrimination has a profound effect on women's well-being, and has been linked to stress-related psychological and physical disorders. However, the extent to which women exhibit compromised health depends on the nature of their experiences, their appraisals and coping skills that elicit particular emotional and biological responses, and the extent to which they have the resources to contend with the situation.

Gender discrimination is not always easily identified, particularly when norms of political correctness exist and render less visible the biases emanating from prejudicial attitudes and social structures. As a result, many women may not regard their experiences as reflecting discrimination, and if they do, they may not be comfortable challenging prevailing beliefs that the world and outcomes are merit-based. Indeed, even when women acknowledge the pervasiveness of discrimination, the ability to reaffirm that the world is just can override the negative consequences emanating from discrimination to women's well-being (Stroebe et al., 2011). Challenges to such beliefs are often met with resistance by men and women alike. Thus,



strategies to address such inequalities cannot be set entirely on the shoulders of women without institutional structures and social policies that affirm that fairness is valued, and that make it possible and meaningful for women to constructively confront systemic discrimination.

Nonetheless, to a large degree, the social context in which individual women operate is not one that can be easily engineered. Yet, organizations can take responsibility for ensuring policies are in place that address situations that give rise to gender inequities, including the areas of employment and pay, sexual harassment, mentoring and social networking, professional development opportunities, and childcare supports. In so doing, addressing inequities becomes normalized, and actions that are not consistent with such policies become counter-normative. In addition, implementation of such policies needs to be sensitive to intergroup dynamics in terms of either entrenching gender differences, or creating conditions wherein women are perceived to be 'in need' of institutional support to succeed. For example, although both men and women perceive employment equity procedures that involve preferential equivalence (i.e., preferential treatment for women when two candidates are equally qualified) to be fair, in a laboratory context, women who were selected under such conditions demonstrated cortisol elevations equivalent to those evident when they failed based on merit, and women in both of these conditions displayed cortisol levels greater than those of women who succeeded based on merit alone (Matheson, Majka, & Giglio, 2002). As the elevated cortisol levels were also associated with higher anxiety, it was suggested that women might have anticipated backlash, or that their own competence might be questioned as a result of procedures that were designed to provide them with equal opportunities (Heilman, Block, & Lucas, 1992). If this is the case, then despite the fact that such procedures are designed to diminish inequalities, they may inadvertently place women at a personal and social disadvantage.

Efforts to provide support for women to contend with discrimination also need to consider variations in women's resources and strategies emanating from their multiple group memberships. Among white women, coping responses were linked to perceptions of control, and they were more likely to benefit in terms of both self-reported well-being and physiological stress reactions (diminished morning cortisol elevations) when they directly confronted situations of discrimination. In contrast, ethnic minority women appeared to be more sensitive to the pervasiveness of such experiences, and thus more likely to adopt avoidant coping strategies, and less likely to show benefits when they expressed their emotions. In addition, whereas espousing a feminist ideology was associated with more positive well-being and reduced stress among white women encountering gender discrimination, this was not the case among ethnic minority women, possibly due to encountering qualitatively different experiences of discrimination that reflect both racism and sexism.

The challenges associated with variations occurring at the intersections of multiple identities in the formulation of programs and policies to counter gender inequities are not insignificant. Analytic tools and strategies exist that, at the very least, promote conscious consideration of the consequences of any given course of action for women who experience multiple forms of oppression that may alter their experience of gender, such as ethnicity, age, religion, and sexual orientation (Siltanen & Doucet, 2008). Such consideration of the social context in which women, in all of their diversity, operate may allow for a determination of the experiences and resources specific to various groups of women that can be brought to bear to promote resilience in the face of discrimination.

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# Sexual Harassment: Motivations and Consequences

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine that you have recently met a man, about your age, whom you feel strongly attracted to. He is waiting at the entrance of a restaurant, looking intensely at you while you cross the street. As you come close, he comments on how sexy you look, then puts his arm around your waist while you are entering the restaurant. Now imagine the exact same behaviors (staring at you, commenting on how sexy you look, and touching you) in a different context, performed by your male boss at work. Whereas you are likely to find the former situation extremely pleasant and exciting, you will probably find the latter episode stressful, offensive, and potentially threatening. The key feature that distinguishes harassing from non-harassing conduct is not any specific behavior, but the fact that it is unwelcome, not reciprocated, and considered inappropriate according to shared societal standards. In fact, practically all legal definitions include ‘unwantedness’ as one of the main criteria for defining sexual harassment.

In this chapter we first present prevalence estimates of sexual harassment, followed by a review of different forms of sexual harassment. We then analyze who is at risk of becoming a victim of harassment and who is likely to become a perpetrator, followed by a discussion of the consequences arising for the victim and for the institution in which the harassment occurs. Subsequently, we focus more in-depth on the harasser and analyze different motivations that may drive harassing behaviors. Finally, we consider situational variables that facilitate or inhibit harassment and discuss intervention strategies aimed at preventing harassment within organizations.

## DEFINITION AND PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Legal definitions vary greatly from country to country, with many countries having no provision at all (see UNIFEM, 2008/2009). In most countries that do have specific legislation,

sexual harassment is treated as a form of gender<sup>1</sup> discrimination, without requiring proof of intentionality of the act. For instance, the European Union (amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC, Article 1.2., 29.9.2002<sup>2</sup>, see also Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 2004) defines sexual harassment as *'any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature [that] occurs, with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment'*. Likewise, according to the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2012), *'unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. ... The harasser's conduct must be unwelcome'*. In the context of educational settings, the US Department of Education (Office of Civil Rights, 2001) defines sexual harassment as *'unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature ... [that] can deny or limit ... the student's ability to participate in or receive benefits, services, or opportunities in the school's program'*. What these definitions have in common is the acknowledgment that the conduct is unwelcome and that it has detrimental effects on the victim (for a comprehensive overview of the legal evolution of sexual harassment in the United States see DeSouza, 2011a).

Sexual harassment is a very common, but generally underestimated, phenomenon. At times, victims do not recognize and label episodes as harassment (especially in countries where awareness of the phenomenon is low, see European Commission, 1998). And even when sexual harassing conduct is identified as such, victims are often reluctant to file complaints or even turn to a confidential counselor or supervisor due to fear of retaliation or lack of trust in the institutions (e.g.,

European Commission, 1998). For this reason, official sexual harassment complaints provide a poor estimate of actual rates of harassment, which are best assessed through representative surveys. Harassment statistics derived from such surveys vary across professional settings, countries, and research methods, but generally between 40% and 60% of women and about 10% of men report having been harassed at work. Since most surveys define a specific time window (e.g., 'within the last two years'), it is likely that cumulative probabilities across the entire lifespan exceed these estimates. Despite these uncertainties, there is little doubt that sexual harassment constitutes a widespread phenomenon in all Western countries where the phenomenon has been studied most systematically. Educational organizations such as schools and universities are no exception. For instance, it is estimated that about 80% of students in public schools in the United States have experienced some form of sexual harassment (American Association of University Women Educational Foundation, 2001; Eckes, 2006; Mentell, 1993).

### **Forms of Harassment**

The term 'sexual harassment' encompasses a variety of behaviors that can vary considerably in severity. In psychological research, sexual harassment is typically divided according to one of two broad classification systems. The first distinguishes *quid-pro-quo* from *hostile environment* harassment. *Quid-pro-quo* harassment refers to situations in which an individual who holds power provides advantages (e.g., hiring), or withholds disadvantages (e.g., firing) in exchange for sexual favors. This kind of harassment requires a status hierarchy and is typically exerted by higher-status males who have institutional power over lower-status females (or, to a lesser degree, men). *Hostile environment* harassment includes behaviors such as telling sexual jokes, making sexual gestures or unprofessional sexist remarks, uninvited touching, displaying sexual materials and the

like, all of which can create an intimidating, offensive, or hostile work environment. The latter form of harassment does not require a power differential and indeed is often displayed by coworkers of approximately equal status. Interestingly, *hostile environment* harassment has even been observed in inverse power relations, such as when individuals in a subordinate position (e.g., students) harass those in a superior position (e.g., professors, see DeSouza, 2011b). For this non-prototypical form of harassment, DeSouza coined the term *contrapower harassment*. Within *hostile environment* harassment, a subtle form of sexual harassment is objectifying gaze (which may be defined as scrutinizing another person's body parts), a form of harassment that is frequently experienced by women (Kozee, Tylka, Augustus-Horvath, & Denchik, 2007; Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). As we will see later, it is a form of harassment that can have remarkable effects on the victim, possibly because of its ambiguous nature.

The other frequently used classification of sexual harassment was originally proposed by Fitzgerald and collaborators (see Fitzgerald & Hesson-McInnis, 1989; Fitzgerald, Gelfand, & Drasgow, 1995), and distinguishes between *sexual coercion*, *unwanted sexual attention*, and *gender harassment*. In this classification, *sexual coercion* represents the most severe form of harassment and includes behaviors such as sexual blackmail, threats aimed at receiving sexual cooperation, or physical attacks. This form of harassment is most likely to occur at critical career stages such as hiring and promotion. *Unwanted sexual attention*, such as touching or making explicit sexual remarks, represents the intermediate level, whereas *gender harassment* (including misogyny and sexual orientation harassment) refers to relatively benign, but particularly frequent, forms of sexual harassment, such as telling sexist jokes or exposing pornographic materials at work. Although *quid-pro-quo* or sexual coercion, unwanted sexual attention, hostile environment or gender harassment

are distinct forms of harassment, they tend to co-occur. For instance, work settings in which unwanted sexual attention is more prevalent also tend to have higher rates of gender harassment, suggesting a generalized problematic situation in the organization (we return to this issue when we consider the important role that the normative context can play in encouraging and discouraging harassment).

As the above examples of harassing conduct illustrate, harassers can employ different channels of communication, including verbal (e.g., sexual jokes, verbal sexual advances), nonverbal (e.g., staring, whistling, exposing pornographic materials), and physical forms of expression (e.g., unsolicited physical contact; see European Commission, 1998). Harassing language practices are particularly common in reference to gays, the second largest group of victims of harassment. Homophobic epithets aimed at denigrating homosexuals (such as 'fag' and 'faggot') are frequently used among primary school (Plummer, 2001) and college students alike (Burn, 2000), and 99% of gay and lesbian college students recount having heard homophobic remarks on campus (D'Augelli, 1992).

A similar pattern of sexual harassment can also be found in cyberspace, but with two important differences: physical contact is by definition impossible and sexual coercion attempts are relatively rare (see Barak, 2005, for an overview). In contrast, gender harassment is very common in chat rooms, forums, e-mail exchanges, and even in regular use of search engines, and it includes both offensive sexual messages and unwanted exposure to pornographic materials. For instance, users may incidentally run into pornographic or offensive materials when searching the Internet, or when unsolicited pop-ups are encountered. Online gender harassment can occur in a variety of different forms, such as when Internet users engage in hostile and insulting interactions, commonly known as 'flaming'. Similar to real world harassment, online harassment

tends to create a hostile virtual environment for women, who often feel obliged to leave online communities for this reason (see Barak, 2005; Scott, Semmens, & Willoughby, 2001). In addition, Internet users may be exposed to unwanted sexual attention and, in some cases, sexual coercion (including cyber-stalking and bribes; see Barak, 2005, for an overview). Although victims cannot be exposed to physical force, they can be threatened or blackmailed to engage in sexual cooperation, as most clearly evidenced by the behavior of adult Internet users recruiting child victims through online interactions.

It is currently difficult to judge whether – given similar conditions – sexual harassment is facilitated in Internet as compared to offline interactions. On the one hand, the greater anonymity of the Internet may make harassment easier, whereas on the other hand the victim is generally better protected as she can leave the situation and interrupt the interaction with greater ease on the Internet than in most real-life situations. Another important question is whether Internet harassment is perceived differently than face-to-face harassment. Berkley and Kaplan (2009) have shown that – given identical content – jurors tend to judge email harassment as harsher than verbal harassment, suggesting that, at least in the eyes of the observer, written harassment has greater weight and is evaluated more severely, possibly because it leaves tangible evidence. Sexual harassment includes a wide range of phenomena that vary from very severe to relatively mild, but interactions in virtual environments largely reproduce the harassment patterns found in the real world.

### ***Victim and Perpetrator Characteristics: Who Is at Risk?***

Across different geographical areas, women constitute the primary target of sexual harassment both in terms of incidence and legal charges. For instance, a recent analysis by the US Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission (2012) revealed that only 16% of all sexual harassment charges in the United States were filed by men. The same report also found that sexual harassment charges by male victims have increased steadily over time (from 12% in 1997 to 16% in 2011). A similar pattern emerges from a national telephone survey conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2008 in which 22% of women, but only 5% of men reported to have personally experienced sexual harassment. Thus, as these studies exemplify, women are the large majority of victims. Importantly, the few studies investigating same-gender versus cross-gender harassment also show that a relevant portion of the male victims involves gay men harassed by heterosexual men, which makes men the most common target of same-gender harassment.

But what is the profile of the typical victim of harassment? Some studies have investigated the characteristics of prototypical female victims. As far as occupational settings are concerned, the European Commission (1998) concluded that ‘women who are between 30 and 40 years of age, single or divorced, with a lower level of education are more likely to experience sexual harassment’. Moreover, women in temporary jobs or in a minority status within male-dominated organizations are most likely the targets of sexual harassment. Also, dual minority status, such as being a black woman (Berdahl & Moore, 2006) or a female student belonging to a national minority group (DeSouza, 2010), seems to constitute a particularly strong risk. Similarly, multi-racial individuals tend to report higher rates of harassment (Buchanan et al., 2009). Finally, there is evidence that women who have already been victims of prior interpersonal violence (such as child or partner abuse) are particularly likely to be targets of sexual harassment (for a recent overview, see Stockdale & Nadler, 2012). Indeed, Stockdale and Nadler claim that sexual harassment often represents a form of ‘revictimization’.<sup>3</sup> Together, the picture



of the prototypical victim emerging from these studies is that of a particularly vulnerable woman, although the source of this vulnerability may be quite varied (e.g., race, young age, low education, critical career stage, solo status, or prior victimization).

There is also another, and quite different, victim profile emerging from research. For instance, in an analysis of different organizations, Berdahl (2007a, 2007b) found that women who do not conform to gender stereotypes and who violate gender-role expectations are particularly likely to be harassed. For instance, assertive, or independent women experience more harassment than those with more feminine personalities. Convergent evidence comes from experimental studies showing that women are harassed more frequently when they express feminist views (see Maass & Cadinu, 2006, for an overview).

These lines of research suggest that there are two distinct types of women who 'attract' the harassing conduct of males, namely weak and vulnerable women on one side and strong and independent women on the other. Given these distinct profiles, it seems likely that different types of harassers are driven by different motivations, given that the former group of women is easily dominated whereas the latter probably poses a threat to male dominance. We will address this issue in depth when we discuss research concerning the motivations driving harassment.

Turning to male victims, although men are overall much less likely to become victims of sexual harassment, they are the most common target of same-gender harassment (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2008). This group of victims includes both gay men (the second largest target group after women) and heterosexual men who do not comply with stereotypical gender norms. Thus, for both groups (male and female victims) gender-role incongruence, along with low status or power, seem to be key risk factors for becoming victims of sexual harassment.

Concerning the profile of the typical perpetrator, the vast majority of harassers are men, although cases of female harassers have been reported and their number seems to be rising as women gain greater power in organizations. Harassers typically are superiors or colleagues, and very rarely subordinates, although cases of *contrapower* harassment have been reported in the literature (see DeSouza, 2011b). Whereas it is difficult to define a precise psychological profile of the typical perpetrator, it is relatively easy to identify individuals with a high harassment proclivity. In this respect, Pryor, Giedd, and Williams (1995) have proposed a Person X Situation model, predicting that only a small proportion of men will harass and they will do so only in settings that permit such behaviors. Men's proclivity to harass is generally assessed through the Likelihood of Sexual Harassment Scale (LSH, Pryor, 1987; see Bartling & Eisenman, 1993, for a similar scale applicable to men and women), consisting of a series of hypothetical scenarios, in which the protagonist may or may not sexually exploit a female subordinate. The LSH scale allows for reliable identification of those men who are at high risk of becoming quid-pro-quo harassers, but LSH is also predictive of other forms of sexual harassment (e.g., Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003; Rudman & Borgida, 1995; Siebler, Sabelus, & Bohner, 2008).

What kinds of men show a high sexual harassment proclivity? Research investigating the psychological characteristics of high LSH men has identified a series of trait correlates of LSH, including high levels of hostile sexism, rape myth acceptance, authoritarianism, endorsement of traditional gender roles and masculine ideology, and low levels of agreeableness, openness to experience, and empathy (see O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Arens Bates, & Lean, 2009; Pina, Gannon, & Saunders, 2009 for reviews).

Another individual-difference variable that predicts sexual harassment is Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), which is the preference for hierarchical group relations. Maass et al.

(2003) found that men with a high SDO were more likely than low-SDO men to actually harass a woman by sending pornographic material to her by e-mail and reporting an intention to harass as measured by the LSH scale. Importantly, high-SDO men not only harassed, on average, more than their low-SDO peers, but they also harassed a feminist interaction partner more than a traditional woman, presumably because feminist women challenge the status advantage of males.

### ***Consequences of and Reactions to Harassment***

There is no doubt that sexual harassment can have severe consequences for the victim and, in the case of work-related harassment, for the organization as well. Various meta-analyses (Cantisano, Dominguez, & Depolo, 2008; Lapierre, Spector, & Leck, 2005; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007) have consistently documented these negative outcomes. More specifically, sexual harassment can have negative effects on both physical and mental health of the victim. As far as physical health is concerned, typical effects involve stress-related psychosomatic symptoms such as headache, nausea, shortness of breath, fatigue, gastro-intestinal problems, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, and weight-loss. Sexual harassment-related mental health problems include depression, anxiety, anger and irritability, uncontrolled crying, and burnout-related symptoms such as emotional exhaustion. In addition, victims often show symptoms indicative of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suggesting that at least some forms of sexual harassment should be considered serious trauma (see Avina & O'Donohue, 2002). Considering the broader and less specific consequences of sexual harassment, research has generally documented a reduction in psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and self-esteem, which, although less dramatic, may be detectable even after considerable time has passed.

In employment contexts, sexual harassment effects have been directly linked to

performance decrements, increased absentee rates, job withdrawal, reduced job satisfaction, and a decline in organizational commitment (e.g., Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). These observable performance effects generally drive the motivation of management to implement prevention strategies, such as normative interventions or diversity management programs. Performance declines have also been studied experimentally, showing that women perform much worse, especially on stereotypically masculine tasks (such as mathematics), when they are sexually harassed. For instance, Gervais, Vescio, and Allen (2011) observed that exposure to objectifying gaze interfered with performance at mathematics for women, but not for men. In a similar vein, Gay and Castano (2010) found a performance deficit on cognitive tasks when women were objectified, a decline that the authors attributed to increased cognitive load. However, the exact processes underlying such harassment-induced performance decrements need to be examined in greater depth, potentially from both objectification (see Bosson, Vandello, & Caswell, Chapter 8 this volume) and stereotype threat (see Betz, Ramsey, & Sekaquaptewa, Chapter 26 this volume) perspectives.

At the same time, even comparably 'mild' forms of harassment, such as exposure to sexually explicit materials, may have important social consequences. Hundhammer and Mussweiler (2012) have argued that exposure to sexual primes will lead to highly gendered self-perceptions and behaviors. In support of this idea, participants who were either super- or subliminally exposed to sex primes (either in verbal or pictorial form) described themselves in a more gender stereotypical way and also behaved in line with traditional gender roles, with women becoming more submissive and males more assertive and dominant. These findings suggest that sexually explicit materials displayed at the workplace or on websites may contribute in a subtle way to the maintenance of traditional gender roles.

Importantly, the severity of the consequences of experiencing sexual harassment varies greatly across settings and across victims, suggesting that organizational factors (such as organizational climate and social support) and personal factors can jointly contribute to the emergence of harassment-related outcomes. In addition, responses to sexual harassment vary greatly across targets. Some victims confront the harasser directly, other victims are unable to take action, either directly (confronting the harasser) or indirectly (turning to supervisors, confidential counselors, coworkers, or seeking legal advice outside of the organization) because they fear retaliation or expect a lack of support.

In addition, some victims are disturbed more by sexual harassment than others and research has shown that such differential appraisals play an important moderating role in the experience of sexual harassment. For instance, victims who are bothered by the harassment episode also tend to experience greater health problems (de Haas, Timmerman, & Hoeing, 2009; Langhout et al., 2005). This moderating role of appraisal on health appears to be more pronounced in cross-race sexual harassment (Woods, Buchanan, & Settles, 2009). Indeed, cross-racial sexual harassment is perceived as more offensive and frightening, which results in more serious post-traumatic stress reactions.

Another important variable moderating the effects of sexual harassment on physical and mental health is the presence or absence of work-related social support (e.g., feeling valued at work and being able to count on one's colleagues; de Haas et al., 2009). Overall, a meta-analysis conducted by Cantisano, Dominguez, and Depolo (2008) suggests that the detrimental effects of sexual harassment vary greatly as a function of the degree of social support available to the victim. While the effects of sexual harassment can be severe and long-lasting, these effects are not automatic; rather, they depend on a number of moderating variables, including the victim's appraisal of the incident(s) and the level of

social support available (see also Matheson & Foster, Chapter 20 this volume).

### **Motivations Driving Harassment**

One of the most interesting and challenging questions is why perpetrators engage in harassment. Given that sexual harassment is counter-normative, and sometimes illegal, why would people (typically men) still engage in harassing behaviors? What is their motivation and what do they gain from it? There are at least three motivations, namely sex, power, and gender identity protection, which have been hypothesized to drive harassing behaviors. First, and most obviously, men (and in a few cases women) may harass because they search for sexual arousal and/or sexual satisfaction. Second, sexual harassment may be driven by a need for power over women (or the victim group more generally). Third, sexual harassment (both of women and, atypically, men) may constitute a means of bolstering one's gender identity as male or to defend it when that identity is perceived as threatened. Below we examine each of these three motivations.

The first motivation underlying sexual harassment – to obtain *sexual favors* – is pretty straightforward. For example, in the case of sexual blackmail, sexual satisfaction or sexual arousal would appear to be by definition the goal of sexual harassment. More specifically, sexual blackmail can be defined as a threat for which sex is the potential price to be paid by the victim. However, sex is an unlikely explanation for other forms of harassment such as hostile-environment or gender harassment. Also, if the desire for sex was the primary motivation, harassers should essentially search for victims who are very feminine considering that most heterosexual men consider stereotypically feminine women sexually attractive; yet, many studies have shown that victims often have rather masculine, gender-role incongruent characteristics (Berdahl, 2007a, 2007b). This suggests that only a portion of harassing behaviors can be accounted for by the desire for sex and that other motivations must come into play.

The second motivation that has been proposed to drive sexual harassment is the *need for power* over the victim. This motivation is based on the connection between power and sex, which is especially entrenched in societies in which strong power inequalities define the relations between men and women. For instance, when organizing his questionable social events, Italy's former prime minister Silvio Berlusconi sometimes invited, along with young and attractive women, powerful men from the TV and film industries because 'these are men who can offer jobs to whomever they want ... thus, the young women have the impression they will find themselves in front of men who can decide their destiny' (intercepted phone call, 23 September 2007, cited in *La Stampa*, 17 September 2011). The common connection between power and sex is in line with the idea that, in some men, the concepts of sex and power are closely and *automatically* linked (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). Using a subliminal priming paradigm, these investigators demonstrated that male participants who were high in LSH were also faster to respond to a series of target words related to sex, which had been primed by words related to power. Moreover, their responses were also faster to power words, which had been primed by sex words. Because facilitation occurred regardless of the direction of the prime-target combination, these results suggest that, in absence of conscious awareness, power and sex are interconnected in the mind of those high in proclivity to sexually harass.

The idea that harassment is driven by power rather than sexual desire is in line with studies showing that harassers often prefer particularly vulnerable victims, including women who have limited resources to react, have multiple minority memberships, or have already been victims of interpersonal violence in the past. Also in line with this interpretation are studies showing greater harassment rates among men who are high in social dominance orientation (Maass et al., 2003).

The third motivation driving sexual harassment is what we have called *gender identity protection* (Maass & Cadinu, 2006). In our research (Dell'Ara & Maass, 2000; Maass et al., 2003), we have focused primarily on the least severe, but also most common form of sexual harassment: gender harassment or misogyny. This kind of sexual harassment poses a puzzle to researchers because it is not aimed at gaining sexual satisfaction. Whereas other forms of sexual harassment may be related in part to the perpetrator's goal of gaining sexual satisfaction, this is not the case for gender harassment. For example, exposing pornographic material, using sexual epithets, or telling jokes, gags, and double meanings that support offensive and degrading depictions of women are behaviors that are not aimed at obtaining sexual favors, but rather are aimed at offending women.<sup>4</sup> Maass and Cadinu (2006) point out that what motivation leads to gender harassment and what kind of satisfaction the perpetrator might derive from this form of harassment can best be addressed from a social identity perspective.

Consistent with social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje (1999) showed that ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination can increase as a function of threat to the ingroup's identity. Because harassing conduct can be conceived as a form of outgroup derogation, we reasoned that sexual harassment could also derive from the desire to enhance or protect (a) the status of one's own gender group especially when the status of the ingroup has been threatened (e.g., via legitimacy threat), or (b) the status of the self within the ingroup has been threatened (e.g., via prototypicality threat). Legitimacy threat was investigated in one of our studies in which participants interacted via computer with a supposed feminist versus a traditional woman (Maass et al., 2003, Experiment 1), and masculinity (or prototypicality) threat was investigated in a second study in which a male participant was told (after taking a fictitious test) that he was a rather atypical male (Maass

et al., 2003, Experiment 2). In line with a gender identity interpretation of sexual harassment, under both types of threat, the level of sexual harassment, operationalized as the number of pornographic pictures sent to the female interaction partner, strongly increased as compared to the no-threat condition. Recently, Hunt and Gonsalkorale (2011), using the same computer harassment paradigm, have provided evidence that such harassment under gender identity threat may serve ingroup-bonding purposes, particularly among males who conform to masculinity norms. In order to distinguish dominance from ingroup-bonding motivation, the authors created a situation in which the two motivations may enter in conflict. The gender identity of male participants was first threatened (or not threatened) and then they were provided with an opportunity to harass a woman in the presence of a peer who either encouraged or discouraged such harassment. If dominance over women was the main motivation, threatened males should harass regardless of the peer's behavior. However, if ingroup bonding was the motivating force, then threatened male participants should align their behaviors with that of their ingroup peer. Results supported the latter explanation: men with a high need to conform to masculinity norms (e.g., to be in control, to have power over women) harassed more, but they did so only under specific conditions, namely when their gender identity was threatened and when a male peer encouraged the harassing conduct. Together, these findings suggest that, for these men, harassment serves to re-establish a positive gender identity by aligning their identity with other ingroup members.

A motivational interpretation is not new to the literature on sexual harassment. For example, regarding same-gender sexual harassment, research has shown that men are much more likely to be bothered, distressed, and humiliated by it than by different-gender sexual harassment (Stockdale, Visio, & Batra, 1999). These authors concluded that men are strongly harmed by same-gender sexual harassment because

these experiences pose a threat to their masculinity. In addition, same-gender sexual harassment might be used as a weapon against those men who violate the stereotypical gender norms on how men should behave.

Also consistent with a gender identity interpretation are results from a study by Siebler et al. (2008), who gave male participants an opportunity to send sexist jokes to a computer-simulated female chat partner. As in Maass et al. (2003), feminists were harassed more than traditional women because by definition they challenge male privilege in society and thus may pose a threat to men with a traditionally masculine gender identity. Overall, the explanation of sexual harassment as gender identity protection has received considerable support, and it has been able to account for the findings that sexual harassment (a) often occurs in situations in which the perpetrator feels under gender identity threat, and (b) is often directed toward strong (e.g., feminists) versus weak (e.g., traditional) women.

Although each of these three motivations may become the main driving force in specific situations and may be directed at specific types of victims, they are not mutually exclusive. For instance, sex and power motivation may co-occur, especially in those males in whom the two concepts are semantically linked. Similarly, exerting power over women may become a strong motivation for those males who are exposed to an identity threat, as in the case of high SDO males, who are particularly likely to harass when their masculine identity is threatened (Maass et al., 2003).

## **PREVENTING HARASSMENT THROUGH NORMS, REGULATIONS, AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT**

Sexual harassment is not confined to any specific context; it can potentially occur anywhere. However, its prevalence varies greatly as a function of the general culture of a country



and of the specific climate within an organization. For instance, the *sociocultural model* (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Rospenda, 2002) identifies socially legitimized power and status differences across gender as causes of sexual harassment in patriarchal society. This model suggests that normative and legal regulations are top priorities in countering sexual harassment. Legislation indeed plays an important social role in communicating what is acceptable and what is not, thus defining the values and morals of a given society. In most Western countries, legislation has erected strict boundaries for interpersonal behavior and the law sanctions sexually harassing conduct. Unfortunately, however, legal regulations are not sufficient means of controlling sexual harassment unless they are accompanied by changes in social norms and in the culture in which sexual harassment takes place.

In this section, we first explore how sexual harassment is influenced by the normative context both in the society at large and within specific organizations. We report evidence from both national surveys and experimental studies showing that the prevalence of harassment varies greatly as a function of normative and legal regulations and of organizational climate. We then examine how harassment can be prevented and addressed in organizations, and discuss the characteristics that harassment policies ought to have in order to be effective.

At the societal level, sexual harassment is influenced by social norms, but the dissemination of such norms depends to a large degree on broadly available channels of communication. As a case in point, restrictive versus permissive norms regarding sexual harassment may be communicated through the media, as recently shown by Galdi, Maass, and Cadinu (2013). In Italy, the overwhelming diffusion of television programs characterized by the presence of women as sexual objects (scantily clad, dressed in a sexually explicit manner, presented in sexually exploitative ways and posing in submissive postures; see Zanardo, Malfi Chindemi, and Cantu's documentary film *Women's*

*Bodies* (2009) as an example) led us to test the hypothesis that exposure to objectifying TV in which women are depicted as sexual objects increases the likelihood of sexual harassment. As predicted, male participants were more likely to send sexist jokes supporting offensive and degrading depictions of women<sup>5</sup> to a female chat-line partner and reported a higher intention to harass (assessed via LSH) after viewing an objectifying TV clip compared to a non-objectifying control clip. Interestingly, men also viewed the female chat partner as less competent after watching the objectifying TV clip despite the fact that there was no logical link between the women shown in the TV program and the specific female chat partner. In a second experiment, using the same procedure, participants also showed an increase in adherence to traditional masculinity norms right after watching an objectifying TV clip, which led to an increase in the number of sexist jokes sent to the female chat partner. Overall, this study revealed that exposure to objectifying TV programs encourages men's harassing responses, most likely because it induces a shift in the norms that govern harassing (vs respectful) behaviors. As a case in point, empirical evidence suggests a relation between adherence to masculine norms and sexual aggression (Pleck, Sonnenstein, & Ku, 1994). Applying these findings to the present issue, exposure to objectifying TV programs may contribute to the emergence of harassment in two ways: by creating harassing role models that adhere to traditional masculine norms such as the pursuit of status and of power over women, and by condoning harassing conduct.

Turning to the organizational level, several studies have shown that sexual harassment is widespread both in educational and in work settings (Petrocelli & Repa, 1998; Richman et al., 1999), but that the incidence rates vary greatly as a function of occupational and organizational characteristics. In particular, temporary workers, employees in lower administrative occupations, and women in male-dominated jobs (such as police officers, bus or taxi drivers, or soldiers)

are most likely to experience sexual harassment (Bergman & Drasgow, 2003; European Commission, 1998; Fitzgerald, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999).

Not only occupational, but also organizational characteristics are critical in determining whether harassment will occur. For instance, in a meta-analytic review of the incidence of sexual harassment in the United States (Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, & Stibal, 2003), sexual harassment was more prevalent in organizations characterized by large power differentials among organizational levels, such as the military. In contrast, lower sexual harassment incidence rates are generally found in organizations that are less hierarchical and characterized by smaller power differentials, such as academia and government. Even within academia, areas such as medicine that are more hierarchical tend to have higher incidence rates than those that are less hierarchical.

Organizational culture is another critical variable explaining differential incidence rates. Organizational culture refers to the values, beliefs, and expectations of the employees (Lahiry, 1994). For example, O'Hare and O'Donohue (1998) found that cultural risk factors most strongly associated with sexual harassment are (a) an 'unprofessional environment' in the workplace (lacking respectful interactions and professional behaviors and appearance), (b) a sexist atmosphere, and (c) the lack of knowledge about the organization's formal grievance procedures. A similar picture emerges from survey data showing that sexual harassment experiences are less frequent in employee-oriented organizations, which focus more on creating a better work environment, and in organizations that allow women to achieve a better balance between work, private and family life (European Commission, 1998). Thus, the normative context and the general organizational climate seem to play a critical role in harassment, in both educational and work settings.

In most democratic countries, organizations are held responsible for preventing sexual harassment or for intervening once it

has occurred. But what prevention strategies are available and what features should these interventions have in order to be successful? It has been argued that a strong, unequivocal, and detailed zero-tolerance policy against sexual harassment is one of the most important means of prevention and creates healthy organizations. For instance, results from a national study conducted in Germany (European Commission, 1998) have shown that 37% of the employees in companies with a generic policy reported sexual harassment, as opposed to 21% in organizations with a detailed sexual harassment policy. However, such policies are unlikely to be effective unless additional conditions are met, including well-defined reporting channels, a consistent application of sanctions, extensive communication and awareness campaigns, the active involvement of management, investment in appropriate resources, and the implementation of regular assessment procedures. We consider the role of each of these factors below.

Regarding the specific characteristics of sexual harassment policies, Bell, Campbell Quick, and Cacyota (2002) suggest that an organization's policy against sexual harassment should be visible and provide multiple, safe-reporting channels. These authors also emphasize the importance of investigating complaints in a speedy and thorough manner so that harassment behaviors are appropriately and quickly sanctioned. In line with these recommendations, O'Leary-Kelly, Paetzold, and Griffin (2000) have argued that the *certainty* of punishment provides more effective prevention than the *severity* of punishment. In a similar vein, studies conducted in schools have shown that consistent responses to incidents of sexual harassment are a critical component of school-wide prevention programs (Corbett, Golder, & Hoffman, 1996; Meraviglia, Becker, Rosenbluth, Sanchez, & Robertson, 2003).

Moreover, any policy against sexual harassment should be accompanied by a communication strategy to promote the policy, increase awareness, and ultimately create a

general climate and culture opposing sexual harassment. Specifically, research has shown that increased awareness of sexual harassment and reduced rates of sexual harassment in schools depend on the clear communication of behavioral expectations and rules, and on the consistent enforcement of these rules (Corbett et al., 1996; Meraviglia et al., 2003). Interesting examples designed for school settings are the discussion-oriented program (including handouts, lessons, classroom activities, writing assignments, and homework) developed by Stein and Sjostrom (1994) for children in the 6 to 12 age group and educational interventions (focusing on awareness and training workshops for both potential victims and potential harassers) proposed by Paludi and Barickman (1998) for elementary and secondary students.

Importantly, to create a solid and lasting organizational culture opposing sexual harassment, top management should be actively involved in formulating and communicating the organizational policy. Because management plays a central role in shaping the organization's culture and characteristics, its actions can have strong effects on the attitudes and behavior of the employees. In two studies conducted in the United Kingdom (European Commission, 1998), about 50% of the employees reported that employers or management were not effectively dealing with sexual harassment. The most commonly reported complaint was that sexual harassment was not taken seriously by management or by others in the workplace, frequently because the management was male-dominated. Thus, a clear management position on sexual harassment appears to be essential: top management should be held responsible for committing the necessary resources for regular assessment and training, and should systematically verify the appropriateness of women's roles, status, and positions. More generally, an effective policy against sexual harassment should also guarantee gender equity and ensure that women are not systematically relegated to

low status and powerless positions throughout the organization.

In order to proactively address the problem of sexual harassment in organizations, it is important to regularly assess sexual harassment incidence rates, which allows human resource managers and policy-makers to create appropriate interventions and to subsequently assess their effectiveness. In order to avoid under-reporting, such assessments should involve specific rather than generic questions. For example, results from a meta-analysis by Ilies and collaborators (2003) have shown that directly querying respondents about whether they had experienced sexual harassment results in substantially lower estimates of sexual harassment incidence rates as compared to using questionnaires providing lists of specific behaviors that constitute sexual harassment. This difference can be accounted for by two factors: (1) employees may be reluctant to label offensive behavior as sexual harassment, and (2) employees may not be able to correctly recognize relatively benign, but particularly frequent episodes (such as sexist jokes) as sexual harassment. To overcome these problems, estimates of incidence rates should include measures assessing both employees' experience with and their perception of sexually harassing behaviors, the level of workplace sexualization, job satisfaction, as well as more objective measures including a list of experiences that constitute sexual harassment. Besides aiding in the implementation of prevention programs, the use of such measures also communicates the importance of detecting sexual harassment and signals the value placed on harassment-free work environments and on healthy organizational relationships. In the case of sexual harassment policies in schools, it would be desirable to use separate teacher, parent, and student surveys. Specifically, the inclusion of parents in school surveys on sexual harassment could increase their awareness of this issue, which in turn aids them in becoming better advocates for their children and ensuring that schools are safe places for students.

As this brief overview illustrates, there are many indications about how to best implement sexual harassment prevention strategies in the workplace and in educational settings. However, most of these interventions are aimed at defining norms and enforcing conformity to these norms, if necessary through punishment. Although able to raise awareness and provide complaint procedures for the victims, these strategies are risky and may, indeed, backfire, especially when applied to men whose social identity derives from their group-based superiority compared to women. Males whose gender identity is at stake may feel threatened when their privileges are challenged or when they are accused of harassing conduct towards their female co-workers.

Over the past two decades, an alternative approach has been developed, generally known as diversity training. Diversity training is part of many diversity management programs and generally aims at creating a work environment 'where "we" is everyone' (Thomas, 1990, p. 109). Although quite compatible with social identity theory, diversity training theory and research has largely been confined to business and management journals and, to date, has received relatively little attention from psychologists (see Pendry, Driscoll, & Field, 2007, for an exception).

Diversity training programs differ from traditional sexual harassment prevention programs primarily in two respects: they are generally broader in scope (not focusing on a single minority group) and they typically combine instructional (e.g., lectures, education, videos) with interactive (e.g., discussions, role-playing, simulations) approaches. Thus, active involvement is an important ingredient of the learning experience. Illustrative examples are Peggy McIntosh's 'walking through white privilege exercise' or related privilege-walk workshops, and Jane Elliott's well-known blue-eyed/brown-eyed simulation (see Stewart, La Duke, Bracht, Sweet, & Gamarel, 2003, for an evaluation). During these exercises employees experience privileges and discrimination on the basis of trivial categorization criteria (such as hair

colour, being right- or left-handed, wearing a beard, etc.). Similarly, employees may participate in role-play and demonstrations (such as taking the IAT, see Pendry et al., 2007) intended to increase prejudice awareness (for an overview see King, Gulick, & Kravitz, 2011). These experiences generally serve as a starting point for a more profound elaboration of the aims of the diversity training.

Although a wide range of diversity training programs are now available, systematic evaluations of their efficacy in terms of awareness raising, workplace behavior, and organizational outcomes are still relatively rare. There is evidence that such programs produce positive short-term effects in both majority and minority employees, but at this point relatively little is known about their long-term effects (Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Waight & Madera, 2011). Therefore, at present, we can only state that this is a promising type of intervention that may produce less reactance than purely normative interventions, especially for males whose harassing conduct is driven by gender-protective motives.

If little research exists on the effectiveness of prevention programs for sexual harassment, even less is known about the effects of sexual harassment on the Internet and ways to prevent it. Although it is practically impossible to change the culture of Internet use because of its self-contained nature and the diversity of its users, Barak (2005) has suggested that much can be done in local online communities 'through the exercise of responsible, dedicated leadership endorsing a firm anti-sexual harassment policy. Such an approach can be implemented through continuous messages ... as well as by transparent sanctioning against any deviation from these standards' (p. 86). Obviously, this kind of leadership will not prevent sexual harassment on the Internet as a whole. Nevertheless, one way to combat sexual harassment on the Internet is to circulate online guides that contain explanations, recommendations, and instructions to be posted on numerous sites in order to highlight this important issue. Unfortunately, educational

efforts will not prevent people with high proclivities to sexually harass from doing so; nevertheless, these educational efforts may make them aware of the negative consequences of their behavior for potential victims.

## CONCLUSION

Sexual harassment in its various forms is widespread in Western countries, and its effects can be very severe, disrupting both the personal and the work life of the victims. Because organizational factors, such as organizational climate, social support, and zero-tolerance rules, can reduce the frequency and severity of sexual harassment in the work place, detailed prevention policies within organizations should not only be encouraged, but also considered assets for society as a whole. Specifically, one could expect spillover effects going from general laws, via organizational policies, to normative behavior across social contexts progressively characterized by respectful social interactions.

The study of sexual harassment also has important connections with other areas of research, such as bullying, discrimination, sexism, and homophobia, some of which have only partially been explored. In addition, research connections may profitably be made to work on stereotype threat and objectification, which also emphasize the role of gender, sex, and sexualization, in both interpersonal and group relations. Therefore, research on stereotype threat and on objectification provide important theoretical and empirical links to the study of sexual harassment that should be developed further in future studies. Such integrative work could help identify the common underlying processes of these seemingly distinct phenomena, ideally leading to broader, overarching models of gender-related harmful conduct. Such an integrative view may also facilitate policy and prevention, as illustrated by the

fact that some organizations have started to address different problem areas (such as harassment and bullying) within common guidelines and intervention programs.

Another area whose connection with sexual harassment appears very promising is the social psychology of communication and media. Our research (Galdi et al., 2013) has shown that watching objectifying TV programs for only three minutes leads to a significant increase in sexual harassment by men. Likewise, Ward (2002) has found that young women (but not men) exposed to primetime TV images depicting men as sex-driven and women as sexual objects showed stronger endorsement of these stereotypes than did women exposed to control video clips. Similarly, exposure to magazine ads featuring women as sexual objects produced stronger acceptance of gender role stereotyping and rape myths among male undergraduates (Lanis & Covell, 1995; MacKay & Covell, 1997).

The connection between sexual harassment and media is also important for the purpose of prevention, considering that young girls are the most vulnerable targets of sexualized media role models. For example, Durham (2009) has analyzed the exploitive and distorted ways in which girls' sexuality is represented by the commercial media, and Brookes and Kelly (2009) have shown how the 'consumer-media culture' has established itself as one of the most powerful influences in processes of self-formation for young people. More generally, recent studies have shown that the use of sex as a commodity in Western media is associated with an increase in the level of sexualization in self-image and interpersonal relations (see Dittmar, 2008; Grabe, Chapter 25 this volume). Therefore, it is important to study the effects of such media culture in relation to sexual harassment, considering that it is a powerful vehicle for sexualized social norms by (1) providing legitimacy to potential male harassers and (2) increasing the vulnerability of women



(or men) and young girls (or boys) as possible targets of sexual harassment. We hope that future research will profit from linking media culture, social norms, and sexual harassment.

From a methodological point of view, sexual harassment research, because it addresses a real-life issue, has mostly employed correlational methods, especially in organizations and educational settings (schools, universities). Comparably few experimental studies have been conducted, despite their obvious advantage in allowing the researcher to draw stronger causal inferences. Given the ethical difficulties in simulating 'real' harassment in the lab and given the limited ecological validity of such studies, the best strategy appears to be a multi-method approach, combining correlational research conducted in the field with experimental designs.

It is important to realize that several research questions related to sexual harassment have been relatively under-investigated. Among others, little attention has been given to sexual harassment in public places (on public transportation and streets), sexual harassment involving male victims (either gay or heterosexual men who do not conform to traditional gender roles), harassment in geographical areas other than the relatively culturally homogeneous areas of North America and Europe, and the important role of bystanders who may or may not intervene in defense of the victim (see Ryan & Wessel, 2012). Also, little is known about the relative efficacy of traditional normative prevention programs versus more experiential intervention strategies, such as those typically employed in diversity training.

Finally, from a theoretical and practical point of view it is important to fully understand the match between victim and perpetrator characteristics, given the paradoxical finding that traditional women are at the greatest risk according to some studies, whereas other studies suggest that non-traditional women are the prime targets of harassment.

We have argued here that different forms of harassment are driven by different motivations (sex, power, or identity protection) and that these different motivations are likely to lead men to choose different types of victims and possibly also different forms of harassment. It is conceivable that traditional women are more at risk for quid-pro-quo sexual harassment, and nontraditional women for hostile environment sexual harassment. If confirmed, this would also imply that different types of perpetrators and victims require different intervention strategies.

## NOTES

- 1 Throughout this chapter we use the term gender in reference to females versus males, and the term sex in reference to sexuality.
- 2 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32002L0073:EN:HTML> (retrieved 19.2.2013).
- 3 Although revictimization is generally defined as the victimization of an adult who was victimized as a child, the definition here is more general as it may also include prior victimization that has occurred after childhood (for instance, as a young adult).
- 4 Besides degrading women, men may also derive pleasure from posting pornography in the workplace which may explain why they sometimes post pornography in all-male environments.
- 5 An example of the sexist jokes used in the experiment is: What is the difference between a battery and a woman? The battery has at least one positive side.

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# Reducing Gender-Based Violence

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) is physical, psychological, or sexual violence perpetrated against an individual or group on the basis of gender or gender norms. The majority of victims of GBV are women, but many victims of GBV are male. Gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals are often targeted due to their perceived failure to conform to societal gender norms (Stemple, 2009). Forms of GBV include, but are not limited to: economic violence (a form of psychological violence); intimate partner violence ('IPV'); sexual abuse; sexual assault and rape; violence arising from traditional practices such as dowries and female genital mutilation; honor killings; trafficking in human beings for purposes of sexual exploitation; forced prostitution; sexual harassment and intimidation; and bullying based on failure to conform to perceived gender roles.

### *Defining the Scope of the Problem*

GBV occurs in every corner of the world. Its manifestations and prevalence rates vary, and robust statistics are scarce. For example, a report by the UN Secretary-General in 2006

cites in-country studies estimating that 10–70% of women have experienced violence (United Nations General Assembly, 2006). GBV targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people is also endemic. Approximately 80 countries criminalize consensual homosexual acts and officials in multiple countries routinely decline to prosecute crimes committed against those who identify as gay, lesbian, or transgendered. Unable to cover each type of GBV comprehensively, we focus on the social psychological context of GBV and interventions that are informed by and seek to change this context. We connect social psychological perspectives and existing evidence regarding the impact of reduction and mitigation strategies in order to contribute to the broader conversation about reducing all forms of GBV.

To do so, we first explore the causes of GBV using social psychological theory and relevant data, focusing on theories explaining perpetration. Where relevant to preventive efforts, we also examine theories predicting victimization. We then examine primary and secondary interventions, outlining a typology of programs based on: (1) their timing in the chronology of GBV incidence; (2) assumptions of the underlying theories about the



causes of GBV; and (3) their methodology. Our review highlights shortcomings in the literature, which is especially lacking in rigorous empirical evaluations, but also highlights mismatches between outcomes of interest and measures. To fill these and other gaps, we consider the existing studies in light of other evidence on gender and behavioral change and suggest potential mechanisms through which programs to reduce GBV might be most effective. Finally, we offer ideas for future program design and evaluation.

### ***Factors Contributing to Gender-Based Violence***

Research has identified factors associated with GBV at the individual, situational, and societal levels. Various academic disciplines and practitioners weight each level differently in their theories and the design of interventions. For example, clinical psychologists and legal scholars have often focused on the individual level, specifically on the pathological personality traits of GBV perpetrators as a means to identify, counsel, or prosecute potential or previous perpetrators (e.g., Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). Sociological and feminist scholarly perspectives traditionally focus on situational and societal levels, such as gendered power asymmetries in a society or an organization (e.g., Brownmiller, 1975; Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982). A social psychological perspective on factors contributing to GBV focuses on the interaction between individual characteristics and the immediate situation in which GBV occurs (e.g., Anderson & Anderson, 2008).

In the following sections, we first highlight societal and situational factors leading to GBV. Second, we consider how these factors may interact with pathological and nonpathological characteristics of GBV perpetrators. Finally, we describe models that predict how individual, situational, and societal factors interact to facilitate GBV. Wherever possible, we cite empirical data to support theoretical predictions about the occurrence of GBV. While the relevant literature is large, we attempt to cover

the most prominent factors featured in social psychological accounts of GBV.

## **SOCIETAL AND SITUATIONAL CAUSES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

From a social psychological perspective, societal factors will be most predictive of a GBV event when they are salient in the immediate situation. Such societal factors include power asymmetries; gender norms, roles, and scripts; societal representations of women; and armed conflict or other crises, among others. These factors can become salient when physical or social arrangements create the expectation of such a factor (e.g., the asymmetrical representation of men at a meeting promotes the idea of male dominance at the organization), when implicit rules that stem from these factors are violated (e.g., a man's behavior that appears to violate a gendered norm causes him stress), or when they are raised in social interactions or media communications (e.g., representations of violence against women are primed by pornography playing on a nearby computer screen).

### ***Power Asymmetries***

Across many different literatures GBV is understood as partially arising from power inequity. Violence is a mechanism for the social control of the less powerful and serves to maintain male dominance and female subordination (e.g., Pratto, 1996). Men enjoy greater economic, political, and social power in the vast majority of human societies, but there also exists variability in these power inequities. Scholars have used this variation to study the circumstances under which power – or motivation to gain power – leads to GBV.

Feminist and evolutionary accounts describe violence as a byproduct of motivation to maintain status and control of economic resources. Evolutionary accounts ground this motivation in the desire to attract mates. Males attempt to maintain their advantageous, unequal status and resources by

coercing other males and females. Feminist theories ground a motivation to be violent in the desire to maintain power and in the idea that violence is a legitimate means of gaining or maintaining power. Both theories predict that societies with greater resource disparity by gender have more GBV relative to societies with greater gender parity. This prediction has been borne out (Schwendinger & Schwendinger, 1983).

Other resource-based accounts of GBV examine changes in men's and women's relative wages as a measure of relative power. An increase in a woman's wages increases a woman's bargaining power within an intimate relationship by making it easier for her to leave (through bettering her chances of supporting herself on her own or finding another mate), and rendering her more likely to assert herself if she chooses to stay (Tauchen, Witte, & Long, 1991). In one sample, an increase in women's wages relative to men's was significantly related to lower incidence of intimate violence leading to hospitalization (Aizer, 2010).

The types of power that lead to GBV are not always based in control of economic resources. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Male Violence Against Women claimed that *all* violence against women involves abuse of power, and that it is the types of power that may vary (Koss et al., 1993). Power conceived of as greater authority in decision-making, for example, is a source of sexual harassment in many workplace settings (Fitzgerald, 1993). Because of power differences, the targets of harassment are unlikely to report the harassment, and in some experimental settings participants have reacted to harassment with polite smiles (e.g., LaFrance & Woodzicka, 2005), demonstrating the extent to which power reproduces cycles of harassment.

### ***Gender Roles, Scripts, and Norms***

Power and power differences, as described above, translate directly into explicit and implicit expectations of gendered behavior – called roles, scripts, and norms – which in turn are associated with GBV.

Gender roles are socially shared expectations about behavior that apply to individuals on the basis of socially identified sex (Eagly, 1987). For any given person, gender roles exist as abstract knowledge structures about groups of people. For instance, as men are more likely to occupy roles that wield power, individuals often expect and socialize males to behave in dominant, assertive manner. As women are more likely to occupy roles as caretakers, individuals often expect and socialize women to be passive, communal, and responsive (Anderson, John, Keltner, & Kring, 2001).

Societal gender roles have been linked directly to GBV, serving to justify behavior or define relationships. Interview studies have revealed that men who beat their wives justify the violence by citing 'unwifely' behavior (Adams, 1988). Other scholars conclude that masculine gender roles have become defined in part by sexual access to and dominance over women (Koss et al., 1993, pp. 235–236). Indeed, research has shown that 'sex role stress', i.e., when men feel they are inadequately meeting prescribed masculine gender roles, predicts sexual aggression (Anderson & Anderson, 2008; Bosson, Vandello, & Caswell, Chapter 8 this volume).

Closely related to gender roles, gendered scripts are essentially roadmaps for behavior considered appropriate for men and women. In gender-polarized societies, scripts for men and women rarely overlap (Bem, 1993). Koss et al. (1993) cite studies of sexual scripts among middle school through college-aged students, showing that, for example, 25% of boys believed that if a man spends money on a woman, then it is acceptable for him to force her to have sex.

Gendered scripts are often reflective of social norms: socially shared perceptions of where a social group *is* or *ought to be* on some dimension of attitude or behavior. Descriptive norms (where the group *is*) imply a perceived consensus about a descriptive pattern of behavior (for example, 'in our group, men typically hit/do not hit their wives'), whereas injunctive<sup>1</sup> norms (where the group *ought to*

be) imply a perceived consensus about a prescribed or proscribed behavior (for example, ‘in our group, hitting your wife is acceptable/not acceptable’). Research has identified norms supporting the acceptability of GBV across a variety of group settings, including workplaces (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993) and the military.

Social norms influence behavior when they are made salient by situational features, often through media. For example, a television or radio program depicting relationships between spouses can reinforce descriptive norms of spousal abuse by featuring a husband abusing his wife. Exposure to sexual violence in popular movies leads many men to become less bothered by sexual *and* nonsexual violence against women (Mullin & Linz, 1995) and behave more aggressively toward women (Donnerstein, 1980). Similarly, exposure to pornographic media is associated with attitudes condoning violence against women (Hald, Malamuth, & Yuen, 2010). Even non-violent pornography typically portrays women as ‘highly sexually promiscuous and frequently as being dominated and “used” by males’ (Hald et al., 2010). These portrayals reinforce beliefs that some women deserve or enjoy being victimized (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Perceptions about what women deserve or want also affect those who respond to gender-based violence: beliefs that sex workers and women who dress seductively ‘deserve’ to be raped have altered courtroom decisions and treatment of targets by law enforcement agents and others (Ahmed, 2011).

### ***Alcohol Consumption***

Alongside media that depicts GBV, alcohol consumption is an example of a societal phenomenon that influences GBV directly. Half of all sexual assaults in the United States and the United Kingdom are committed by a perpetrator who has been drinking alcohol (Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004; Bowen, 2011). Even controlling for relationship conflict, intimate partner violence

(IPV) is more likely on days when alcohol was consumed than on days when it was not (Bowen, 2011). Alcohol consumption often interacts with other situational and individual factors to facilitate GBV, a phenomenon we will discuss in the next section.

### ***War and Other Humanitarian Crises: Societal Violence***

Other settings that may prime individuals to commit GBV include armed conflict and humanitarian crises; societies pervaded by violence and disruption are more conducive to sexual violence (White & Post, 2003). In particular, GBV has been linked to strategies of intergroup competition, such that sexual abuse of an outgroup female is a symbol of colonization (Wood, 2009). A challenge for scholars examining the link between GBV and armed conflict is to understand how conflict elevates the likelihood of GBV. While high rates of GBV are observed in countries experiencing war, it is unclear what proportion of wartime GBV is motivated by the same social and individual factors salient in peacetime – perhaps given fuller expression by social disorder – and what proportion is due to unique wartime and emergency factors, such as the greater polarization of gender roles and intergroup competition (Cohen, 2010; Wood, 2009).

### ***INDIVIDUAL CAUSES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE***

Societal and situational factors alone cannot explain GBV; they likely combine with individual stressors and attributes to fuel GBV. We explore these interactions in this section, beginning with a discussion of the literature’s shift from focusing on a pathological model of GBV perpetrators to a non-pathological model. We then focus on qualities deemed to be non-pathological predictors of GBV perpetration, such as narcissism, impulsivity, and sexism, among others. Both the pathological and non-pathological literatures are plagued by the methodological problem that

GBV prevalence is often measured through self-report or biased samples of convicted perpetrators of GBV (thus excluding those who evade conviction or treatment).

### ***Pathological Personality Traits of Gender-Based Violence Perpetrators***

While psychopathology partially explains sexual aggression, many perpetrators exhibit no extreme or abnormal personalities or social profiles (Malamuth, 2003). In samples varying from college-aged men to juvenile offenders to adult male sexual offenders, men who gain gratification from controlling or dominating women or who are distrustful of women, often display the following pathological personality traits: callousness, disinhibition, narcissism, and antisocial personality disorder colored by impulsivity. Another path to sexual aggression, which can interact with pathological traits, arises from a personal history that includes a lack of emotional bonding with sexual partners, familial conflict or abuse, and adolescent delinquency (Malamuth, 2003).

### ***Non-pathological Traits of Gender-Based Violence Perpetrators***

Studies have generally not found many personality differences between perpetrators and non-perpetrators of sexual assault, although there are some differences between perpetrators of rape, specifically, and those who have not committed rape (Voller & Long, 2010). In terms of the 'Big Five' broad domains of personality, rape perpetrators score lower on agreeableness and conscientiousness compared to sexual assault perpetrators and non-perpetrators, and are lower in extraversion than non-perpetrators.

One important predictor of GBV perpetration is social dominance orientation (SDO): an individual's degree of preference for one's own group to dominate other groups (Pratto, Sidanius, & Stallworth, 1994). High levels of SDO are negatively related to support for women's rights and LGBT rights, and men are significantly higher in SDO compared to

women in male-dominated societies, where GBV prevalence is highest.

Relatedly, the need to dominate was the most common reported motive in a study of convicted rapists (Groth, 1979), and the concepts of dominance and power are linked to sex more strongly in men who report sexually harassing women than others (e.g., Pryor & Stoller, 1994). While abused wives often report that their husbands have more power than they do (Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson, & Gottman, 1993), their abusive husbands simultaneously report feeling less powerful than their wives (Johnson, 1995). These studies underline the importance of carefully monitoring interventions designed to empower women who are at risk for abuse in their relationships.

A perceived need to dominate may arise from a perceived violation of the gender roles, scripts, and norms. For example, men who have lower economic, educational, or occupational status than their wives and men who perceive themselves to have less decision-making power than their wives are more likely to use violence (Babcock et al., 1993). Power and sex can even be linked at a non-conscious level for men who are likely to sexually aggress or harass (Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, & Strack, 1995). That is, power can 'prime' thoughts of sex unconsciously, due to the strong connection forged between power and sex through individual traits and socialization. Regardless of whether this causes or is symptomatic of a predisposition to harass, individuals with a strong implicit connection between power and sex can be cued to aggress even when they are not aware of this influence. This finding previews the importance of understanding the interaction between personal risk factors and societal and situational influences.

### ***Risk Factors for Gender-Based Violence Events***

Targets of violence may be at elevated risk for GBV in certain situations, such as during and immediately after pregnancy, when a woman tries to leave a violent relationship,

or when there are drastic changes in power dynamics, such as relative income (Nasier & Hyder, 2003; O'Reilly, Beale, & Gillies, 2010). We now explore how theories of societal, situational, and individual factors interact to predict GBV in these and other scenarios.

### **PERSON X SITUATION INTERACTION MODEL OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

The social psychological perspective posits that GBV occurs as a result of the interaction of individual, situational, and societal factors (e.g., Anderson & Carnagey, 2004; Malamuth, 2003). Within a given society, many individuals exhibit personality traits or are exposed to norms that promote or condone GBV. Individuals might be high in social dominance orientation; perceive that spousal abuse is common; or be exposed to polarized scripts for gendered behavior, societal violence, or media promoting violence against women. Yet, not every individual facing any or all of these factors will engage in GBV. Many empirical studies have tested whether the interaction of individual, situational and societal factors that are salient in the moment are more predictive of GBV than the factors alone or cumulatively.

For example, alcohol consumption alone can increase aggression and inhibit higher-level cognitive processing (e.g., Lisak & Roth, 1988), but when *paired with* an individual's preexisting hostility toward women, it significantly increases feelings of justification of force against an intimate partner (Abbey, Parkhill, Jaques-Tiura, & Saenz, 2009). Alcohol's effects on sexual aggression depend on both an individual's pathology and expectations (Abbey & Thomson, 1992; Klosterman & Fals-Stewart, 2006). Alcohol consumption also makes it more difficult to evaluate complex stimuli, increasing one's likelihood of ignoring subtle cues (Steele & Josephs, 1990), and it can alter the interpretation of another individual's behavior, leading

intoxicated men to conclude friendly statements indicate sexual interest (Abbey, Zwacki, & McAuslan, 2000). Alcohol also increases aggressive responses (Taylor & Chermack, 1993), which is especially concerning because alcohol is often consumed in settings in which male dominance or sexualized cues are emphasized. These settings, already having primed potential perpetrators for violent reactions, are especially fertile grounds for GBV.

Other studies have explored how individual characteristics reinforce the societal link between power and sexual violence. In a series of experiments (Bargh et al., 1995), investigators subconsciously primed male participants with the concept of power (words relating to both authority, like 'boss' and 'influence', and to physical power, like 'tough' and 'strong'), and then introduced the participants to a female confederate. When primed with power, males who scored highly on the Attractiveness of Sexual Aggression scale (Malamuth, 1986) reported being more attracted to the female confederate than men who scored low on this scale. Interestingly, when not primed with power, men reported significantly less attraction to the female relative to low-scoring males. This is strong evidence that the activation of the concept of power directly activates the concept of sexuality, but the extent to which it has an effect depends on an individual's level of attraction to sexual aggression.

The interaction between social models of behavior in a particular situation and individual characteristics can predict the likelihood of sexual harassment. Men who were either high or low in self-rated likelihood to sexually harass (compiled from a survey assessing responses to various situations where the subject envisions having power over a woman) were asked to teach and then grade an attractive female confederate on an office task (Pryor, LaVite, & Stoller, 1993). Half of the participants worked with a male authority figure who touched the female confederate sexually and made sexually suggestive comments; with the other half of participants, the



same male authority figure treated the female confederate professionally. Men high in likelihood to sexually harass were more likely to engage in touching and suggestive talk after working with the harassing authority figure than when they worked with the non-harassing authority figure. Men who were low in likelihood to sexually harass treated the female professionally regardless of the behavior of the authority figure.

An interactive understanding of factors facilitating GBV can inform interventions such that programs hone their targeting strategy by considering situations likely to promote GBV, and the normative perceptions or stable individual characteristics of likely perpetrators within those situations. However, as the next section demonstrates, interventions with such a carefully crafted targeting strategy are rare and rigorously evaluated interventions even rarer still.

## INTERVENTIONS

Though many interventions have been designed to combat and reduce GBV, we focus on programs that have been empirically evaluated with clearly delineated methodology. The set of inadequately detailed evaluations of interventions is large, leaving methodological and theoretical gaps. To compensate for the empirical shortcomings, we rely on psychological models of behavior change to hypothesize potential mechanisms through which interventions may be effective.

We divide our discussion of interventions by timing. Primary interventions seek to prevent violence before it has begun by targeting social norms or through educational outreach. These programs focus on societal and situational factors. Secondary interventions address or 'treat' violence once it has occurred, often at the situational or individual level. Secondary interventions include batterer intervention programs, couples therapy, programs to increase help-seeking behavior by targets, civil protective orders, and criminal sanctions, among others. Many

interventions include both primary and secondary elements, an overlap we note when present. We also classify interventions based on whether they target individual, situational, and societal factors, or an interaction of these factors.

### **Primary Interventions**

#### *Educational Interventions*

The main difficulty in assessing educational interventions is that most empirical studies omit curricular details, making it difficult to place the program in the social psychological context of GBV. We focus on a few studies offering program details in order to examine the potential mechanisms for behavior change and explain uncertainty in results.

#### *Preventing Dating Violence*

The exaggeration of gender roles by youth and adolescents is hypothesized to increase the risk of dating violence and therefore should inform the design of primary interventions in schools (Black & Weisz, 2008). One school-based intervention program targeting early adolescents is the 'Safe Dates Project'. Investigators randomly assigned 14 schools to the Safe Dates Project or to a control (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007). The control schools were informed of local services available to adolescents in violent relationships. The Safe Dates schools received this information in addition to a 10-session course, a theater production on dating violence, and a poster contest. Service providers in all communities were given special training.

One month after the intervention, students who received the Safe Dates intervention reported stronger perceived norms against dating violence, less gender stereotyping, and greater awareness of available services (Foshee et al., 2000). Reported rates of all types of violence also decreased in the treatment schools, but it is not clear whether this is a decrease in self-reported violent behavior, self-reported victimization, or both. One year later, there were no statistically significant

differences in reported behaviors between the two groups, although self-reported acceptance of dating violence decreased and awareness of negative consequences of dating violence increased in both the treatment and control groups.

Other curricula target adolescents' attitudes, specifically those that may 'justify the use of dating aggression' (Avery-Leaf, Cascadi, O'Leary, & Cano, 1997, p. 13). In one study, pre- and post-tests showed that adolescents of both genders in a treatment group expressed significantly different attitudes about dating violence following the curriculum's implementation compared to a no-treatment group. These results are consistent with other studies that find self-reported positive attitudinal changes but do not measure subsequent behavior or perceived social norms (e.g., Black & Weisz, 2008).

### ***Interventions Outside of School for Adolescents and Young Adults***

Other primary intervention programs target adolescents and young adults through community centers or other gathering places. One such intervention, Program H, targets participants' perceptions of social norms regarding masculinity. The program began in Latin America and the Caribbean; it has since been implemented in other countries (Barker, 2007).

By changing perceptions of norms of masculinity, Program H hopes to encourage more gender equitable behaviors and attitudes among participants. Program H uses social modeling techniques to communicate gender equitable social norms and to transfer relationship skills in peer-to-peer educational sessions. Male facilitators attempt to communicate that gender equitable behaviors are typical and desirable (i.e., normative) through the use of role-plays, videos (including some featuring undesirable behavior to provoke discussion), group discussions, 'brainstorming', and reflection. Sessions cover sexual health, violence and violence prevention (including GBV), substance abuse, and fatherhood, among others.

In some settings, Program H also targets men outside of these small group sessions using media campaigns such as radio transmissions and billboards. Male participants in peer-to-peer workshops develop the media campaigns in order to ensure that the norms communicated originate within the audience's own social group. For example, one Brazilian Program H campaign targeted descriptive norms of support for gender equity by promoting the message, 'In this community, men support gender-equity'. In an attempt to increase the likelihood that this norm would be activated in situations where GBV might take place, the campaign used the slogan 'In the heat of the moment' to evoke the moment before a man hits his partner or insists on sex without a condom. This strategy is an excellent example of the person and situation interactive approach, which posits that social norms must be activated in situations where the targeted behaviors might take place.

Comparisons of Program H interventions (with heterogeneous implementation) indicate that a significantly smaller proportion of participants in intervention sites report supporting traditional gender norms as compared to control sites (Barker, Nascimento, Pulerwitz, & Segundo, 2006). However, evaluations of Program H rely on participants' self-report and focus more on personal attitudes than on social norms, which are a primary target of the program, and are therefore imperfect.

### ***Programs Directed toward Likely Targets of GBV***

Some programs focus on potential targets of violence, seeking to help them avoid future violence. The design and implementation of target-oriented programs can be controversial in the context of GBV, because targets of violence are blamed frequently for their suffering based on their failure to conform to societal norms. We discuss two types of preventive interventions that aim to reduce the prevalence or severity of GBV by reaching potential targets prior to victimization.

### *Anti-Trafficking Interventions*

Trafficking in persons, particularly sex trafficking, is an understudied topic and programs meant to prevent trafficking are sparsely evaluated. The United States Department of State issues annual reports highlighting efforts by individual countries to reduce trafficking, but has not, to our knowledge, provided evidence of the success of such programs in reducing trafficking (US Department of State, n.d.). Programs in source countries have sought to inform at-risk communities of possible trafficking using community theater, and training workshops have been used for likely ‘consumers’ of trafficked persons, including government and international agencies. Interventions aimed at the general public often seek to raise ‘awareness ... through information dissemination to potential victims of trafficking’ (Amenuvor, 2010). Correlational studies suggest that programs raise awareness of definitions of trafficking, and of knowledge of home country trafficking laws and of international trafficking regulations (Sainsbury, 2006; Amenuvor, 2010), but do not measure an effect on trafficking prevalence.

### *Rape and Assault Prevention Interventions*

The primary preventive strategy to reduce rape and sexual assault among adults in the United States is self-defense instruction (Brecklin, 2008). Empirical studies of self-defense programs show a range of effects on women’s ‘rape avoidance’ in the event of assault (Brescoll & Ullman, 2008). Although studies also examine attitudinal outcomes, including assertiveness and self-esteem, such effects typically disappear within six months of the program’s conclusion (Brecklin, 2008).

### *Media and Social Norms Marketing Campaigns*

As we noted at the outset, the perception of community disapproval may affect behavior, despite personal attitudes and beliefs to the contrary. Because of the theorized relationships between many types of GBV and perceived norms regarding violence and gender,

social norms marketing (including the Program H campaign described above) is a promising primary intervention to reduce GBV. Social norms marketing includes marketing techniques, such as mass media and face-to-face campaigns, that are designed to alter individuals’ perceptions of social norms, specifically perceptions of attitudes and behaviors that are typical or desirable in their community.

Rather than directly targeting personal attitudes or beliefs, social norms marketing targets *perceptions* of the prevalence of certain attitudes or beliefs in the community. Social norms interventions are supported by research showing that social norms affect behavior change more dramatically than personal attitudes (Paluck, 2009). Social norms can sustain GBV rooted in community customs, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) (a custom in which girls’ sexual organs are cut as a rite of passage, see Grabe, Chapter 25 this volume). Even when families oppose FGM, they may have their daughters cut because they perceive that other community members view it as normal or desirable, or they believe their daughter’s chances of marrying will be reduced by foregoing FGM. Personal disagreement with a norm alone does not change behavior; even when a large percentage of a group no longer personally supports the behavior, it may persist due to the belief that other members of their group subscribe to the norm (known as ‘conservative lag’; Prentice, 2012).

Successful efforts at the end of the nineteenth century to abolish footbinding of girls in China weakened a negative descriptive norm and propagated a prosocial injunctive social norm (‘girls in this community should not have their feet bound’). The efforts paired campaigns advertising that the rest of the world did not engage in footbinding, broadcasting the health effects of footbinding, having parents of girls pledge publicly that they would not bind their daughters’ feet, and, crucially, having parents of boys pledge that they would not allow their sons to marry girls with bound feet. This example provides insight as to how social

norms interventions can facilitate behavior change in a way that attitudinal change alone may not (Mackie, 1996).

The media's power to influence perceived gender norms has been demonstrated in studies examining instances in which media depicted widespread adoption of different gender roles and responses to GBV. For example, viewing television programs that depict neighbors and family members rejecting domestic violence was correlated with a decreased likelihood that survey respondents defend or approve of domestic abuse (Scheepers, 2001). Likewise, access to cable television in India, including international programming where women are more outspoken, was associated with a significant decrease in the reported acceptability of domestic abuse (Jensen & Oster, 2009).

Edutainment (the integration of educational messaging with popular entertainment) is a common form of social norms marketing. Initially popular as a public health intervention, edutainment now includes programming seeking to reduce GBV. Two edutainment programs addressing GBV have been rigorously studied: *Soul City* (South Africa) and 'We are Different, We are Equal' (Nicaragua).

*Soul City*, a weekly television and radio edutainment program broadcast throughout South Africa, targets injunctive norms by aiming to perpetuate the norm that 'people in South African communities disapprove of GBV'. For example, one episode portrays people beating pots and pans to voice their disapproval when they overhear their neighbor beating his wife. The show uses characters with respected roles in society speaking out against GBV in order to weaken perceptions of existing norms that imply domestic violence is common to the point of acceptance or trivial (Soul City Institute, n.d.). South Africa's racial, tribal, and socioeconomic diversity poses a challenge for social norms marketing, as heterogeneous groups may struggle to identify with diverse characters. It is challenging to make a norm relevant to an undefined and broad community.

Despite that challenge, one study found that people who chose to listen to the *Soul City* radio drama were more likely than non-viewers to believe that women in their community should not tolerate abuse and that the community does not approve of domestic abuse. The study showed no effect of choosing to watch *Soul City* on other types of norms regarding domestic violence and sexual harassment. Anecdotal reports also indicated some communities adopted the pot-banging response indicating disapproval of domestic violence in their own communities (Scheepers, 2001).

The 'We are Different, We are Equal'<sup>2</sup> (SDSI) campaign is another edutainment initiative targeting norms surrounding GBV. For the SDSI program, Puntos de Encuentro, a Nicaraguan non-governmental organization, launched a weekly edutainment television show, a call-in radio show, and a women's magazine (Bank et al., 2008).

From 2002 to 2005, Puntos de Encuentro featured the slogan 'We need to be able to talk'. The goals of the media programs were to encourage discussion of taboo topics and encourage help-seeking behavior by promoting an injunctive norm that people in the community *should* address difficult topics like GBV. Along with radio, television, and magazine campaigns, billboards advertised the 'need to talk' slogan in 17 cities in Nicaragua and identified health service providers in each locality so as to channel individuals into places where they could act on new norms about addressing GBV (Bank et al., 2008).

Higher exposure to the television or radio campaigns correlated with higher scores on a gender-equity scale across three surveys. However, SDSI highlights one frequent tension within awareness-raising campaigns: campaigns may emphasize the widespread nature of a taboo topic to encourage survivors to discuss the problem, but advertising the behavior's prevalence can increase its perceived *normalcy*. A descriptive norm underlining the commonality of a negative behavior that is not accompanied by an injunctive norm emphasizing the disapproval

of the community can license future violence. Thus, primary interventions can be a double-edged sword: they offer the potential to stop GBV before it occurs but also risk perpetuating negative descriptive norms.

Other programs use social norms messaging without the tools of mass media. For example, the White Ribbon Campaign encourages men to wear ribbons symbolic of a ‘pledge to never commit, condone, or remain silent about violence against women’ (United Nations, n.d.). Although it has not been rigorously evaluated, this campaign is promising because it raises awareness by promoting the positive descriptive norm that men in the community do not support violence against women rather than by emphasizing the negative descriptive norm that violence against women is pervasive in the community.

## **Secondary Interventions**

### ***Media Campaigns Targeting Individuals Suffering GBV***

Secondary interventions to mitigate GBV or reduce its prevalence often promote help-seeking behavior. Paradoxically, campaigns that encourage help-seeking by making targets feel they are not alone may promote the negative descriptive norm that GBV is common or even normal. These descriptive norms, as described in a previous section, may even increase the frequency of GBV. Where GBV is highly prevalent and services are available but underutilized due to lack of awareness or stigmatization of GBV, awareness or stigma-breaking campaigns may be critical. However, based on existing studies demonstrating the probable negative effects of such undesirable descriptive norms in other contexts, such as interventions to reduce alcohol abuse, such campaigns should be limited to the early stage of information dissemination and breaking down stigma; years later, the risks of perpetuating a negative descriptive norm may outweigh the benefits of a message emphasizing that targets are not alone.

Soul City provides a positive example of a media intervention encouraging help-seeking behavior by channeling individuals into services rather than promoting a negative descriptive norm. Soul City collaborated with the South African National Network on Violence Against Women to establish and promote a hotline for targets of IPV. The hotline offered crisis counseling and referrals to community-based service providers (Scheepers, 2001). The number of the hotline was displayed during each episode of the *Soul City* TV program for a year; one episode also featured the main character calling for help after being abused. This depiction may weaken an existing injunctive norm that women should keep IPV private and can channel targets of IPV into services. Strong behavioral evidence of the program’s effect came from the number of hotline calls, which was dramatically higher on the day the show aired than on other days.

The ‘It Gets Better’ campaign is another promising effort to raise consciousness while minimizing the promulgation of destructive descriptive norms. The online activism program uses video messages uploaded to the Internet to tell LGBT teenagers who are bullied on account of their sexual orientation that they are not alone in their plight but that, per the campaign’s name, life will get better (It Gets Better Project, 2010). The campaign began in September 2010, and there are no impact assessments available. However, the program’s message implies that the negative descriptive norm (‘bullying of LGBT youth is common’) is temporary and will improve, thereby modeling an intervention seeking to reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking behavior (such as calling suicide hotlines), while limiting its reinforcement of the negative descriptive norm. Public health interventions also provide models that can be adapted to address GBV. Specifically, these models undermine negative injunctive and descriptive norms while promulgating positive messages that resonate with all members of a community (e.g., Wechsler et al., 2003).



### *Group Interventions to Change Violent Behavior or Reduce Repeat Violence*

While social norms marketing campaigns seek to reach a broad audience that includes actual and potential perpetrators and targets of violence, other secondary interventions focus on actual offenders and aim to reduce repeat GBV. Many states in the United States mandate specific interventions for various perpetrators of GBV, such as those convicted of IPV or sex offenses. Most states mandate group interventions known as Batterer Intervention Programs (BIPs) to prevent recidivist IPV (Rosenbaum & Kunkel, 2009).

There are two primary models of BIPs – the psychoeducational, often explicitly feminist models, and the therapeutic cognitive behavioral approach (Jackson et al., 2003; Rosenbaum & Kunkel, 2009). Many BIPs blend elements of both models, leading to the increasingly popular gender-based, cognitive behavioral model (Rosenbaum & Kunkel, 2009). Although BIPs have been repeatedly studied over the 40 years they have been implemented in the United States, such studies are often of limited utility due to the studies' dearth of program details. It is often impossible to determine what the program involves and how loyally it implements the model, even where a study identifies a given BIP as following a particular intervention model. We have gleaned available details regarding each of these models and discuss them below.

#### *Psychoeducational Model*

The psychoeducational model theorizes violence as a result of primarily situational and societal factors, and seeks to reduce violent behavior by changing batterers' experiences and internalization of 'patriarchal ideology' (Jackson et al., 2003). The most well-known psychoeducational model is the feminist Duluth Model, which states its goals as 'help[ing] men change from using the behaviors on the Power and Control Wheel, which result in authoritarian and destructive relationships, to using the behaviors on the Equality Wheel, which form the basis for

egalitarian relationships' (Babcock, Green, & Robie, 2004, p. 1026; Pence & Paymar, 1993). The Power and Control Wheel is a circle with eight segments, each describing common IPV events, such as threatening one's partner. The Equality Wheel contains opposite behaviors.

Duluth Model programs last approximately six months and often follow substance abuse treatment. Program participants are introduced to the Power and Control and Equality Wheels early in the intervention (Pence & Paymar, 1993). The curriculum addresses eight themes related to the wheels' eight segments, including non-violence and negotiation. Each topic is covered in two to four sessions, with the first sessions involving video vignettes exemplifying the violent behavior, followed by participant logging of their own violent behavior, and group discussion of that behavior and non-violent alternatives (Bowen, 2011; Parker, 2007).

At least 35 studies have examined psychoeducational programs similar to the Duluth Model. A few of those studies have used an experimental or quasi-experimental approach, typically comparing a feminist BIP model to a probation-only control group. In one such study, IPV perpetrators were randomly assigned to a one-year term of probation or to probation plus 26 weeks of mandatory participation in a feminist model BIP. The baseline study found no significant differences between the two groups in terms of their self-reported behavior and attitudes or police records prior to treatment. However, those in the BIP group were less likely to be re-arrested after intervention than those in the probation-only group (Davis, Maxwell, & Taylor, 2003; Jackson et al., 2003).

#### *Cognitive Behavioral Model*

The cognitive behavioral model 'views battering as a result of errors in thinking and focuses on skills training and anger management', which are generally individual and situational causes of GBV (Jackson et al., 2003, p. 1). Because violence is theorized as learned behavior, the programs are built on

the idea that non-violent behavior can likewise be learned (Babcock et al., 2004). Most programs include anger management techniques, such as using timeouts to de-escalate conflict and exercises to improve communication skills and to minimize aggression (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). In these ways, the model is similar to couples counseling, although cognitive behavioral BIPs do not include the targets of violence.

Evaluations of explicitly cognitive behavioral models are rare. One experimental study conducted with approximately 150 US Navy personnel compared a 36-week cognitive behavioral group, a 26-week couples therapy group, a group subjected to rigorous monitoring, and a no-treatment control group (Dunford, 2000, cited in Babcock et al., 2004). Results were gauged by differences in partner-reported violence and police records after one year. There were no statistically significant differences among the intervention groups, although the unique features of a military community (characterized by a high stake in social conformity) may mean the majority of an intervention's effect could be traced to the arrest itself.

### *Gender-Based Cognitive Behavioral Approaches*

BIPs that combine the psychoeducational feminist model and the cognitive behavioral model follow a gender-based cognitive behavioral model (Gondolf & Jones, 2001; Vaddiparti & Varma, 2009). Interventions based on this model range from an educational or instructional format to a free-flowing group discussion model (Gondolf, 2004).

One meta-analysis compared three<sup>3</sup> gender-based cognitive behavioral programs in different cities using instrumental variable analysis to correct for endogeneity in studies comparing program completers with program dropouts and to account for contextual differences between program sites (Gondolf & Jones, 2001). Although each program was labeled 'cognitive behavioral' and met certain criteria such as meeting individual state standards (in three different states), descriptions of the precise program models and implementation

were not provided in the analysis. Using perpetrator and target surveys and police records, the study revealed that 41% of the men re-assaulted their initial partner or a subsequent partner over a 30-month period, and half of those men re-assaulted their partners repeatedly. The analysis concluded that program length is not significantly associated with program completion or differences between re-assault rates, but that program completion is a statistically significant predictor of lower re-assault rates – the study found program completion led to a 44–64% reduction in likelihood of re-assault, even controlling for some endogeneity. This study offers some support for three-month cognitive behavioral programs because there were no significant advantages to longer, costlier programs, although the study notes the identified effects qualify only as moderate. The analysis is of limited utility because it does not provide details regarding the curricula of any of the programs and because the number of programs included was small (three). Further, while the analysis provides moderate support for three-month cognitive behavioral interventions, it does not provide more specific guidance for programs.

### *Restorative Justice Models*

One feature BIPs share, regardless of their model, is a narrow focus on the batterer. Restorative justice models generally focus on the interaction of individual needs and societal factors like community support and integration. One such model is Arizona's 'Circles of Peace' group intervention, which includes only one batterer along with various members of his community, including, where the target chooses to participate, the target of past violence (Mills, Maley, & Shy, 2009). An evaluation of this program is ongoing but not yet available; we note, however, that the intervention escapes one potential pitfall of BIPs, which is that groups of batterers may enforce negative descriptive norms by making batterers acutely aware of how many other individuals perpetrate similar violence

within their own communities. By surrounding the batterer with individuals who will not tolerate continued violence, models such as Circles of Peace may be able to reinforce a community injunctive norm that battering should not occur in a given community.

### ***Individual Interventions to Reduce Gender-Based Violence***

#### ***Therapeutic Interventions***

Couples counseling, typically cognitive behavioral therapy, is an alternative to group interventions for perpetrators of IPV. Counseling at the couple level generally seeks to develop anger-management techniques (Maiuro, 1991). Such counseling frequently attempts to assist an abusive individual in distinguishing between negative (permissible) emotional responses and aggressive (impermissible, violent) behavioral responses. Couples counseling also focuses on specific tools like taking a 'time out' when the individual recognizes signs of anger or arousal to de-escalate conflict. This intervention thus focuses on the individual factors leading to abuse, but also points out situational triggers of those individual factors.

Couples counseling has been criticized for 'encouraging the underlying inequity of power between the partners', and perhaps pressuring the target of abuse to remain in the relationship (Lawson, 2003, p. 26). Some studies, albeit generally those with small sample sizes, have concluded that couples counseling, particularly when paired with individual counseling, 'may be safe and beneficial' (Klein, 2008, p. 46, citing Johansson & Tutty, 1998). However, one meta-analysis found that while all forms of group interventions have some non-zero effect as compared to mere arrest, cognitive behavioral therapy has no effect (Babcock et al., 2004). In addition, another study concluded that men who violated protective orders but were assigned to anger-management interventions had higher re-offense rates than those assigned to BIPs, despite having lesser criminal histories (Klein, 2008).

### ***Legal Responses to GBV***

Because GBV is regulated by the law, it is also important to examine the psychological rationale underpinning various legal interventions that respond to GBV. Some legal interventions target individual and situational factors facilitating GBV, while others potentially influence societal drivers of GBV. An important function of all legal remedies is their expressive value: the criminalization of all forms of GBV – including everything from the violation of a protective order to rape as a weapon of war – constitutes official condemnation of GBV and a powerful indicator of the injunctive norm that individuals within the community (defined by the jurisdictional reach of the law) should not perpetrate or tolerate GBV.

Law enforcement interventions are perhaps the easiest to implement, but many legal interventions are also known to exacerbate tense situations. Mandatory arrest (laws requiring an arrest in any domestic disturbance call) allows for a period of relative calm in which the abuser and victim are separated, decreasing recidivism compared to law enforcement inaction or spontaneous counseling (Wanless, 1996). However, one study found the effect of mandatory arrest transitory (Tauchen & Witte, 1995), and another showed mandatory arrest laws correlated with an increase in intimate homicide due to decreased reporting and increased reprisal (Iyengar, 2009). Mandatory arrest policies, developed in large part to improve inadequate police responses to IPV reports, respond to the situational risk presented by reporting, known to be a heightened period of risk for IPV incidents, but may function solely to shift the high risk period to the time the accused is released from custody rather than the time immediately following the police report.

Specialized law enforcement units for IPV or other forms of GBV, such as women's police stations, are another global trend. Specialized stations recognize that reporting GBV is often stigmatizing and may require the target to step outside of gender scripts

and assert power against the perpetrator. These stations seek to create new standards in which reporting is encouraged and responsiveness prioritized. In some countries, women's police stations seek to reduce revictimization of those reporting rape by assigning only female law enforcement personnel to such stations. In various United States locales, studies have indicated that assigning severe IPV incidents to a specialized police force may decrease recidivism despite the high risk of repeat violence in severe IPV cases (Klein, 2008). Specialized domestic violence courts are another mechanism through which to facilitate delivery of target services, batterer intervention, and criminal punishment (Gover et al., 2004). Studies indicate that specialized domestic violence courts increase target court appearances (Hartley & Frohmann, 2003).

The United States and many other countries seek to reduce harm to targets partially by addressing power asymmetries in violent relationships through civil remedies known as protective orders. Protective orders may require that the perpetrator maintain distance from the target and include 'no contact' provisions (Logan, Shannon, Walker, & Faragher, 2006), thus discouraging the abuser from exerting physical or emotional control over the target and establishing, at least in theory, that the target is protected by the law. However, one literature review identifies an average violation rate of 40% in the United States (Logan et al., 2006). Reported violations may lead to police intervention preventing a violent occurrence, but may also incite anger in the person served the order. As there are likely significant differences between individuals who obtain a protective order and those who do not, conclusions about the effectiveness of protective orders are difficult to discern.

## CONCLUSION

Various theories of gender-based violence, and thus theories of how to reduce GBV, place different weights on individual, situational,

and societal factors that drive GBV. Rigorous evaluations of GBV interventions are infrequent, and those that are conducted are often limited by shortcomings in their methodology and measurement, and their lack of detailed intervention description. By placing interventions in the context of social psychological theory and evidence, we aim to identify the driving factors of GBV and the most useful ways to measure intervention outcomes.

Throughout this chapter, we have signaled which interventions employ a social psychological approach to reducing GBV by examining the interaction of individual, situational, and societal factors. Interventions' targeting, and their ultimate efficacy, is improved when they begin with analysis of which individuals will perpetrate or seek help for GBV, given situational circumstances and societal conditions. Many educational interventions, such as Program H, combine attempts to change individual perceptions of social norms or individual knowledge about GBV with media interventions that target particular situations where GBV transpires most frequently. Likewise, Soul City takes a social psychological approach by targeting perceived social norms about domestic violence with media and makes available information to ameliorate or address violence, such as posting a help hotline number. BIP combines both situational and individual levels of intervention. We recommend more analysis and design of GBV interventions that use this social psychological interactionist approach.

We have also reviewed many interventions that target primarily individual variables, such as attitudes, skills, or knowledge. Although evaluations of these programs do not show that they are less effective than interventions taking multiple factors into account, this lack of evidence is primarily due to the paucity of evaluation. In addition, many interventions claim to target one factor, like societal gender norms, but measure another, such as individual attitudes. As discussed in this chapter, strong evidence supports the hypothesis that behavior change is more strongly connected with social norms than personal attitudes, and

as a result programs seeking to inspire behavior change would do well to focus on social norms rather than, or at least in addition to, individual attitudes.

We conclude that interventions, once designed to address the interaction of individual and societal factors, must be evaluated in a way that demonstrates their causal effect and measures that effect appropriately. Many scholars agree with this assessment, including the American Psychological Association (2011), which has provided recommendations similar to our own regarding programs concerned with violence against women.

Methods of data collection and evaluation are critically important. While we review a number of evaluations that should be lauded for their attempts at experimental or quasi-experimental analysis, many are incomplete and unable to draw causal links between interventions and outcomes. Researchers, as they develop the theory that drives their studies, should allocate resources to data collection methods such as randomization of subjects, comprehensive baseline studies, assessment of possible backlash, establishment of appropriate control groups and, where possible, reducing survey attrition by following respondents across time and space. Some of these data shortcomings can be ameliorated with statistical tools such as matching or regression discontinuity designs, but causal links will be more easily supported if data collection and survey design adhere to an experimental framework.

Based on the research available at this time, we recommend that individuals designing GBV reduction programs conscientiously develop a theory of the specific form of violence they aim to reduce and intervene by examining the individual, situational, and societal factors that support the most frequent instances of that violence. For example, a program to address power asymmetry within an ongoing relationship should be conceptualized differently than a program to encourage help-seeking behavior. We also advise avoidance, particularly in awareness-building campaigns,

of perpetuating negative descriptive norms, which may undermine program goals.

The vast literature on GBV is indicative of the broad-based and constructive community of scholars and practitioners dedicated to the reduction of various forms of gender-based violence. Our review of this wide and deep body of work suggests at least two general directions for future research and intervention. First, we suggest a definition of GBV that is inclusive of all violence perpetrated based on perceived failure to conform to societal gender norms (including violence based on sexual identity or orientation) and all sex-specific harms (such as rape). Second, we encourage researchers and practitioners to continue to develop interactionist theories about the causes of GBV; that is, GBV as caused by the interaction of individual, societal, and situational factors. By applying this interactionist social psychological perspective to GBV interventions, and by understanding GBV as violence perpetrated on perceived failures to conform to gender norms, we believe this literature – and more importantly, efforts to reduce GBV – will move forward even further.

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## NOTES

- 1 Although the term 'injunctive' may most quickly bring to mind norms regarding what should *not* be done, injunctive norms include both prescribed and proscribed behavior, encompassing also that which *should* be done.
- 2 *Somos Diferentes, Somos Iguales* in Spanish ('SDSI').
- 3 The study initially included four programs, but one program was dropped due to unusually high court involvement, leading to unusually high completion rates among court-mandated participants relative to other cognitive behavioral programs studied. The three studies included were in Denver (lasting 3 months), in Dallas (lasting 9 months), and in Houston (lasting 5.5 months).



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# An Essential Debate: Science, Politics, Difference and the Gendered Self

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## INTRODUCTION

‘The Essential Difference’ is the title of a book by Simon Baron-Cohen first published in 2003. In this book, Baron-Cohen summarizes his theory of empathizing and systematizing. In its simplest form, this theory argues that ‘[t]he female brain is predominately hard-wired for empathy [and the] male brain is predominately hard-wired for understanding and building systems’ (p. 1). In short, Baron-Cohen offers an account of gender differences in thought and behavior that rests on fundamental, and internal, differences between men and women. ‘The Essential Difference’ is also the title of a book edited by Naomi Schor and Elizabeth Weed published almost 10 years earlier, in 1994. Schor and Weed’s volume presents a collection of feminist contributions to the political debate around essentialism versus social constructivism. Contrary to what one might immediately expect, the goal of this volume is not to reject the notion of fundamental differences between men and women. Rather, the assembled

authors grapple with the meaning of difference as it sits in relation to feminism. In its simplest form, this volume poses the question of whether there can be such a thing as feminism that exists outside of some essentialized notion of women and that ignores differences between the genders.

The existence of these two books, both with the same title, attests to the fact that there are some common concerns that underlie many, if not most, discussions of gender – namely, the twin questions of *what are* the differences between men and women and *how should* we understand those differences (e.g., as ephemeral versus essential to male and female beings). What is also clear from these two books is that one can approach these kinds of questions from quite different viewpoints (see also Eagly, Chapter 2 this volume). For example, one might see these questions as primarily scientific, with answers that can ultimately be revealed through systematic comparisons of male and female thought and behavior. Alternatively, one might view these questions as primarily philosophical or political and

locate scientific comparisons within these broader perspectives.

The present chapter also aims to explore similar issues. But rather than trying to answer the question of whether there are demonstrable or fundamental differences between women and men (e.g., arising out of their evolved, biological, make-up or through socialization and adaptation to cultural norms), or what we should or should not say about gender difference in a political sense, this chapter instead focuses on the debates that surround questions of difference and the connections between science and politics when people enter into these debates. As a backdrop to this discussion, I first review some key perspectives on the study of gender differences in the psychological literature. From that backdrop, I will consider the debates these perspectives have given rise to or reflect, both in their scientific and political instantiations. Finally, I examine the ways in which these ideas – both scientific and political – are reflected in ordinary people's thinking about gender and the implications of different beliefs about gender for individual thoughts, feelings, and actions, both towards others and the self as a gendered being.

## **NATURE VERSUS NURTURE: SCIENCE VERSUS POLITICS?**

The question of how and why men and women differ is not a neutral one. Rather, the answers people provide to this question, and the question itself, typically trigger strong reactions. The galvanizing power of gender differences is as apparent within scientific work as it is within public discourse. Indeed the debate over similarities versus differences is one of the defining features of the psychological literature on gender. The modern version of this debate perhaps starts with Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) seminal book *The Psychology of Sex Differences*. This volume summarized the psychological literature that had by that time accumulated around the question of gender differences, and particularly focused on

exploring evidence for differences in a variety of stereotypical domains. On the basis of their review, these authors concluded that while in many areas gender stereotypes were not substantiated by actual differences between men and women, in certain limited domains there was evidence of significant differences. These domains were verbal abilities (higher in women), mathematical and spatial abilities, and levels of aggression (all higher in men).

Despite the apparent scientific evidence, the existence and meaning of these differences was soon challenged. Hyde (1981) statistically re-analyzed the literature summarized by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) and, while acknowledging evidence for certain differences, highlighted that the effect sizes associated with these were so small as to raise questions about their practical meaning. On the basis of this and subsequent analyses, Hyde has advanced the gender similarity hypothesis (Hyde, 2005). This states that most differences between men and women are close-to-zero, and that where differences do occur these are typically small rather than moderate or large. As such, men and women are more similar than they are different. One conclusion Hyde draws from her work is that overinflated claims about gender differences are of more psychological concern than gender differences themselves, because these claims, and the popular beliefs they generate, have costs when the behavior of men and women is constrained by societal expectations.

Rather than ending the debate, Hyde's evidence for overarching similarity simply became another point of contention. In 1995, Eagly also reviewed the accumulated research on gender differences (Eagly, 1995a). Her conclusion, however, was that there were a number of non-trivial differences between men and women in terms of cognition, ability, and behavior. Moreover, Eagly argued that many of these differences were important and required explanation, something that they had not received because of the political agenda that had informed gender difference research – namely, an apparent feminist goal of refuting difference.



Although Eagly expressed sympathy with this perspective, she also questioned its long-term value. According to her, denying gender differences restricts our ability to understand where difference comes from, whatever the answer to that question might be. This contribution to the debate, of course, prompted reactions of its own (e.g., Buss, 1995; Hyde & Plant, 1995; Marecek, 1995), many of which prompted their own reactions (e.g., Eagly, 1995b, 1996). And so the debate over the existence and meaning of gender differences continues (see Eagly, Chapter 2 this volume, for an update on this debate).

The point of this brief exploration of the psychological literature is to highlight that, even within the confines of academic journals, people are rarely dispassionate about gender differences. And the reason for this – as many of the actors in this debate agree – is that in this particular domain, science is political. Yet acknowledging the political nature of this area of science does not lead to the same conclusions, even among commentators who share the same broad political agenda. While it is tempting to equate the denial of difference with the feminist answer to the gender question, this simple mapping does not seem to hold up to the diversity of perspectives that exist among feminist psychologists interested in gender. Not all feminists think the same way, and there is no uniform ‘feminist position’ on gender difference research. Some feminists are pro-difference, or at least the study of it (Eagly, 1995a; Halpern, 2000), whereas others remain critical of the focus on difference at the expense of similarity (e.g., Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994; Hyde, 2005).

Where this debate gets particularly heated is around the question of how evidence of gender difference should be interpreted – namely, should this be interpreted as revealing something inherent about men and women, or should it be interpreted as a reflection of men and women’s positions within society. This divergence in perspective – which parallels the nature versus nurture debate in public discourse – can be seen in further exchanges in the academic literature

(see also Fine, Chapter 4 this volume). To give one example, in 1989 Buss published a piece summarizing patterns of mate preferences among men and women across 37 cultures. This large-scale survey revealed certain reliable cross-cultural patterns of male–female difference in preference: men were more inclined to rate physical attractiveness and youth as important qualities in a potential mate, whereas women were more inclined to rate financial capacity as important. Buss interpreted these differences as evidence for the role of evolutionary pressures in shaping men and women’s psyches – men, in order to maximize their reproductive success, have evolved to attend to cues to fertility, whereas women, in order to maximize paternal investment in offspring, have evolved to attend to cues to wealth and status. As such, Buss located gender differences in the fundamental evolutionarily shaped psychological make-up of male and female beings.

Differences themselves are not explanations, however, even when these appear to be universal. This point was articulated in a response to Buss’s analysis in which Eagly and Wood (1999) suggested that such patterns of difference could equally be reflective of the different roles men and women occupy in society. Because of their physical differences (e.g., in strength and child-bearing) men and women are better suited to certain roles than others (e.g., roles that involve physical strength). This biological difference creates a sex-based division of labor and sex-based differences in power and resource-control. Sex-stratification in these terms leads individuals to make choices (e.g., about partners) that maximize their own utility. This being the case, Eagly and Wood (1999) argued, societies characterized by greater role divergence should produce greater evidence of gender differences in mate preference. Consistent with this alternative account, reanalysis of the data revealed that the universal differences claimed by Buss were most evident in societies characterized by greater economic inequality between men and women. Among societies characterized

by relative equality, male and female preferences did not diverge so strongly.

While the above represents a relatively tame instance of the debate between different explanations for gender difference, as for the question of difference itself, this particular debate has continued relatively unchanged to the present (e.g., Archer, 1997; Eagly, 1997; Lippa, 2010; Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allick, 2008; Wood & Eagly, 2002). While the sharp distinction between biological versus social causation has given way to more sophisticated models that acknowledge interactions between these forces, depending on their theoretical perspective, scientists often still emphasize one class of explanation over the other. It is unsurprising that feminist scholars typically lean towards the societal frameworks for explaining gender differences where these do arise. If gender differences arise from forces outside of women and men, then these are, at least in theory, changeable, a message that lends itself more easily to a progressive agenda. Notwithstanding this, however, equating feminist politics with particular perspectives on gender is equally ill-fitting when it comes to the question of biology. There are feminist perspectives that embrace the idea of biological underpinnings to gendered patterns of thought and behavior and see these as consistent with a progressive political agenda (e.g., Hrdy, 1999; Vandermassen, 2005). Thus, while it is clear that the science of gender difference is political, the politics of that domain are not simple and straightforward.

## **ESSENTIAL DEBATES: OPPRESSION VERSUS LIBERATION**

In many ways the scientific debate that I have sketched above is a reflection of a larger debate that has occurred throughout the history of feminism and other identity-based political movements (e.g., those based around sexuality and ethnicity/race). In those instances, the debate over similarities versus differences, and how these should be interpreted, is also a defining feature of the

literature. Within these literatures, it is the philosophical perspectives of essentialism (i.e., the notion that group differences stem from some underlying and inherent reality) and social constructivism (i.e., the notion that group differences are a product of social forces and expectations and thus are fluid and changeable) that are most often contrasted.

Given the ultimate goal of equality, positions that challenge and critique differences between people based on their group membership (i.e., positions that are social constructivist or anti-essentialist) are prototypical within identity-based political movements. Within the context of feminism, the social constructivist position on gender is perhaps most easily captured in the famous quote from Simone de Beauvoir (1973, p. 301) that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman', and more radically stated in the work of Judith Butler (e.g., Butler, 1990). However, just as is the case within the narrower field of psychological research on gender, the simple mapping of essentialism versus social constructivism with oppressive versus progressive politics is not always possible. Even within an overarching concern for similarity of rights, opportunities, and treatment, differences between men and women are sometimes highlighted and sometimes essentialized.

Indeed, the history of feminism may be better characterized by a variety of perspectives on the question of similarity versus difference rather than an outright rejection of the latter in favor of the former. Early feminism was principally concerned with the attainment of equal access for women to the public domain – such as the rights of citizenship, voting, and education enjoyed by men. However, despite the goal of equality, early feminists appealed to both gender similarities and differences in pursuing their political agenda. For example, although men and women were often characterized as equally capable of thought and reason, at times early feminists highlighted women's unique moral sensibilities as a means to suggest their special value in the public

domain or that women were particularly likely to benefit from access to education (see Kimball, 2001, for a summary of the historical context of similarity and difference claims).

Certain branches of feminism have developed the notion of essential differences further. Again, the domain of morality is central to such ideas. For example, feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan (1982) advanced the idea that women might be fundamentally different from men in terms of moral reasoning. Specifically, she argued that men are inclined to approach moral questions through the lens of justice, whereas women are more likely to focus on relationships and care. Thus, rather than being merely the same as men, women have their own unique qualities that make them different, and perhaps better than men.

While this kind of 'difference feminism' portrays women in a positive light, these ideas remain controversial within the broader feminist literature. Many feminists reject the idea that there might be any shared qualities that define women in a universal sense – regardless of whether these differences are positive in value – because such a position is as essentialist as one that explicitly devalues the capacities of women. The core concern here is that portraying certain virtues as essentially feminine normalizes and makes universal a certain standard of femininity (Stone, 2004); and that this can lead to the kind of exclusion that feminism is supposed to challenge – for example, of women who do not live up to this feminist ideal because they do not reason from a perspective of care and relationships.

Perhaps because of these problems, anti-essentialism became the orthodox position among many feminists of the 1980s and 1990s (Fuss, 1989; Schor, 1994). In its extreme form, anti-essentialism rejects any prescriptive notion of women and any idea of universal or shared qualities that apply to women as a group and that distinguishes them from men. Although this does appear to be the most straightforward position from which to advocate equality, anti-essentialism is also not without its problems. Most obviously,

anti-essentialism poses an important philosophical challenge to political movements based around identity. If there is no fundamental basis for considering people a group (e.g., based on their gender, sexuality, or ethnicity), and no room for them having shared experiences or ways of seeing the world based on that group membership, then mobilizing around that group membership to affect social change becomes difficult if not impossible. This problem is perhaps best articulated in a quote by Grosz (1994) in the aforementioned feminist collection, *The Essential Difference*. She asks:

[I]f women cannot be characterized in any general way, if all there is to feminism is socially produced, how can feminism be taken seriously? What justifies the assumption that women are oppressed as a sex? What indeed does it mean to talk about women as a category? If women are not a category, what grounding does feminism have?

Responding to this conundrum, a number of feminist writers have articulated a third way of navigating the tensions between similarity and difference. This position has come to be known as 'strategic essentialism', and is associated with the work of a group of feminist writers located in post-colonial studies (e.g., Luce Irigaray, Gayatri Spivak). Broadly, this perspective starts from the assumption that there are, indeed, no essential features or qualities that unite all members of a minority (e.g., based on ethnicity or gender). Despite this, strategic essentialists suggest that it might sometimes be advantageous for minorities to act as if their differences are real and essential: difference can be a useful political tool. For example, acting as if there is some real and essential quality to one's group can make it easier to foster identification among group members and commitment to the collective cause that they share by virtue of group membership. Essentializing the group can also make it easier for the minority to articulate a clear position with respect to the majority and to claim access to certain rights based on group membership (e.g., specific protections). At

other times, however, attending to diversity in minority perspectives may be more important than emphasizing within-group similarity and between-group differences. Under these conditions, essentialism may be of less value. I return to these possibilities in more detail below where I consider the limited work that has been conducted on minority essentialism.

That essentialism might sometimes have progressive value, as well as regressive costs, has been recognized in a number of other identity-based political movements. The perceived political value of essentialism is perhaps clearest in the context of movements based around sexual identities. The idea that sexualities are somehow inherent and inborn (i.e., an essentialist position) has been a useful rallying point and a means to challenge the prejudicial argument that sexuality is a choice and therefore malleable. However, even here, whether or not an essentialist position is more or less politically useful than the social constructivist alternative is a vexing issue. For example, an essentialist position on sexuality highlights fundamental differences between people based on their sexual 'orientation', and the notion of fundamental differences is something on which prejudice and discrimination can also be based. Again, in response to this tension, some have articulated the need to engage with essentialism carefully and selectively. This response is best articulated by another quote, this time from Celia Kitzinger (1995, p. 155):

It is not obvious that either essentialism or social constructionism is intrinsically best suited to be the theoretical precursor to lesbian and gay liberation ... It seems that the oppression of gay men and lesbians can be effected by both essentialist and social constructionist alike; and equally the struggle against that oppression can make use of both (albeit logically incompatible) frameworks. My own solution is to be a radical lesbian feminist first, [and] a social constructionist (or essentialist) when it suits my radical feminist purposes.

In considering the political debates that contrast similarity and difference within feminist writing and related literatures, what is clear is that strong forms of essentialism – for example

those that suggest that certain groups are inherently different, and typically inferior, to others on all dimensions – are largely discredited and seen as ideologically oppressive. However, 'softer' forms of essentialism – for example, those that draw on difference and suggest certain positive qualities or universal and shared experiences that arise from group membership – can sometimes be appealing from a minority perspective. What can also be seen is that while social constructivism is an almost definitional feature of these identity-based movements, there is some recognition of the limits of social-constructivism for achieving the political aims these movements seek. As such, social constructivism may not always be so politically inspiring. Just as seems to be the case in the scientific domain, in the more politically oriented literature the fundamentals of difference – whether this is something that should be pursued or avoided – seems open for debate.

## ESSENTIALIST THINKING AMONG 'ORDINARY' PEOPLE

I have reviewed the scientific and political literatures above in an attempt to illustrate the complexity of ideas about the essential nature of gender. It is important to acknowledge that these reviews are necessarily superficial and far from complete. Hopefully, however, they manage to bring some common issues to the fore. As noted in a number of places, rather than there being a uniform position on how we should understand gender – both scientifically and politically – there is debate. People enter into that debate from a variety of positions and see different value in the idea that men and women are fundamentally different (versus the same) and that these differences might be essential aspects of their being (rather than products of society). Often, essentialist ideas are rejected as inherently oppressive. But there are places where these ideas are seen as less problematic or even potentially liberating. There is also some acknowledgment in the psychological literature that explanations of

gender differences are likely to involve some interplay between natural and social forces. Thus, the idea that gender differences involve nature *or* nurture is an oversimplification (Fine, 2010, see also Chapter 4 this volume). Notwithstanding these broader issues, psychological research has also been interested in how these ideas about gender filter down to the general public and how this affects the way that they think about and act toward others on the basis of their gender. Here, the picture seems clearer: thinking about gender in essentialist terms does seem to have negative consequences, both for intergroup relations and for individuals.

Research into beliefs about the existence and underlying cause of gender differences can be considered under the broader umbrella of work on psychological essentialism (for a recent review see Haslam & Whelan, 2008). Essentialism refers to the lay belief that group memberships can be explained in terms of some deeper underlying essence that all group members possess, and that the characteristics associated with these are natural, inherent, and pre-determined by virtue of that underlying essence. Because of this, membership in an essentialized group is seen to be highly informative about individual group members: If individual group members possess the same underlying essence, they should think and act in ways that are similar to other group members. As such, an essentialist perspective on groups can also lead to a perception of intergroup boundaries as sharp and distinct: if group membership reflects some underlying and unchanging essence, then individuals can not pass so freely between groups because they retain their original essence.

Essentialism seems to be a feature of how people routinely think about a variety of group memberships – including hypothetical groups, arbitrary preferences, and social categories like nationality, race, and religion (Demoulin, Leyens, & Yzerbyt, 2006). Essentialism can also take a variety of forms. The most prototypical instantiation of essentialist thought is the idea that group membership is underscored

by some biological marker that is shared by all group members and makes them what they are (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011; Keller, 2005). However, essences can be located in things more abstract and ephemeral than biology. For example, people may engage in metaphysical essentialism (i.e., perceiving people to share a certain ‘spirit’) or even social essentialism (i.e., the belief that social origins inevitably determine individual character, Rangel & Keller, 2011).

Studies that have explored essentialist thought across multiple groups suggest that gender may be a particularly essentialized social category. For example, research by Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst (2000) assessed the degree to which a variety of social groups were perceived in relation to two dimensions related to essentialism. On the one hand, social groups varied in the extent to which they were perceived as *natural kinds* – typified by beliefs that the group has sharp boundaries, stable properties, defining features, and that group membership is immutable and with a natural basis. On the other hand, social groups also varied in the degree to which they were *reified* – typified by beliefs that group membership is informative and identity-defining, and that individual group members are somehow alike (see also Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002). Although both sets of belief constitute forms of essentialism, these researchers found that the social categories of gender, race, and ethnicity exemplified those categories that are routinely considered as natural kinds. Consistent with this, correlational work that explored lay theories about these social categories revealed that while people generally attributed differences based on both race and gender to social forces more than biological ones, biology was seen to be more relevant to the explanation of gender differences than racial ones (Martin & Parker, 1995).

Reflecting the particular tendency to essentialize gender, experimental work has shown that people readily generalize information about a single individual to their gender category as a whole. For example,



Prentice and Miller (2006) gave individual participants feedback about their own standing on a novel personality trait and then assessed how prevalent they thought that personality trait would be among men and women more generally. Importantly, this feedback was given to the individual alone, or they learned that their characteristic was either shared by or different from one other participant of the opposite gender who was also being tested. This manipulation varied the extent to which the individual's own characteristic covaried (or not) with the gender of one other person. The results showed that people tended to generalize their own personality trait to members of their gender group, but that this generalization was particularly pronounced when their personality feedback was overlaid with a gender difference. Said differently, learning that one man and one woman were different on a novel dimension was sufficient to lead to the generalization of this difference to all men and all women. Thus, differences – even when these may simply be interpersonal – are readily interpreted through a gendered lens.

### **Consequences of Essentialist Thinking**

Part of the interest in essentialist beliefs is the assumption that these have important consequences for how people evaluate and respond to others in their social world. Indeed, even early social psychological theorizing linked essentialist beliefs to social prejudices (Allport, 1954), a link that has subsequently been explored empirically across a variety of domains, including gender. What these investigations show is that while essentialist beliefs can be associated with prejudicial attitudes, this link is not always as strong and consistent as Allport originally suggested. For example, a correlational study by Haslam and colleagues (2002) found no significant relationships between either natural kind beliefs or reification with sexism or racial prejudice, although essentialist beliefs were related to prejudices based

on sexuality. Subsequent studies, however, have revealed more straightforward links between measures of essentialism and individual differences in prejudice (e.g., Keller, 2005; Rangel & Keller, 2011; Roets & van Hiel, 2011).

The somewhat inconsistent relationship between essentialist thinking and prejudice may stem from the fact that essentialist beliefs entail a tendency to fall back on a categorical understanding of the social world. While such an understanding often does have evaluative consequences and can lead to prejudice, the reliance on social categories *per se* (i.e., independent of their attributed value) may be the more prominent feature of essentialist thinking and evaluative prejudices a secondary outcome of this (Bastian, Loughnan, & Koval, 2011). Indeed, research has shown that essentialist thinking reinforces the reliance on social categories in social perception and action. For example, studies show that indices of essentialist beliefs about personhood (e.g., believing that people's characteristics are fixed, genetically inherited, of a categorical either/or nature, and therefore informative) are significantly correlated with the endorsement of both positive and negative stereotypes about social groups, including those based on gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and occupation (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; see also Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998). In addition to shaping the degree to which people think of others in terms of group membership (i.e., stereotype), there is some evidence that essentialist beliefs can also predict the ways in which people respond behaviorally on the basis of category membership. For example, a recent study by Bastian and colleagues (2011) found that essentialist thinking was associated with a faster approach tendency towards symbols or one's national ingroup than symbols of a national outgroup. Together with evidence from other intergroup settings (e.g., race: Williams & Eberhardt, 2008), this suggests that essentialist beliefs might guide patterns of preferential interaction with others who share one's group membership. As such, essentialist thinking does

seem to entail a readiness to perceive the social world through a categorical lens and to act on that basis.

In the specific context of gender, experimental research confirms this link between essentialist beliefs and stereotyping. For example, Brescoll and LaFrance (2004) exposed participants to newspaper articles that emphasized either the biological or social basis of a novel gender difference in ability (the ability to identify plants). Activating biological (versus sociological) beliefs was found to increase participants' belief that human qualities are fixed (Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995) and to increase the tendency to endorse gender stereotypes. Thus, a biological framework on gender seems to solidify the link between stereotypic attributes and group membership, and may also reinforce the notion that these attributes are unlikely to change (Martin & Parker, 1995; Miller & Prentice, 1999; Prentice & Miller, 2006).

In addition to guiding how people view others based on their group membership, by binding stereotypic attributes to group membership, essentialist thinking can also have consequences for how individuals think about themselves. Consistent with this, research shows that activating a biological view of gender leads women to subsequently engage in more self-stereotyping – that is, to see gender stereotypical traits as more applicable to their individual self (Coleman & Hong, 2008). Research by Dar-Nimrod and Heine (2006) further reveals this self-determining power of essentialized gender categories. Drawing on research into stereotype threat (Steele, 1997), they asked women to complete a mathematics test under conditions in which their gender was made salient prior to the test versus a control condition. Extending this paradigm, in two additional conditions they provided women with one of two different explanations for stereotypic gender differences in mathematics ability – one emphasized biological factors and the other socialization. In line with typical stereotype threat effects, their results showed that making gender salient reduced

women's test performance relative to a control condition. Notably, reading about the biological basis of gender differences had the same effect and reduced performance relative to reading about socialization as the cause of gender differences.

Of course, the consequences of essentialist ideas for gendered self-perceptions should not be limited to women but should also frame the way men think about themselves and male behavior, and there is also some evidence of this. For example, Gaunt (2006) found that fathers who endorse essentialist ideas about gender were less inclined to contribute to the care of their children, and had wives who were more likely to do so. Presumably, their belief in natural gender roles contributed to a traditional gender-based division of labor in their own family, affecting both their own behavior and the behavior of their partners. Research by Dar-Nimrod, Heine, Cheung, and Schaller (2011) further showed that portraying a stereotypic male behavior, in this case the propensity for sexual violence, as originating from biological drives versus socialization processes had consequences for how men evaluated such behavior. Specifically, sexual violence was seen to be more problematic, and attracted a more punitive response, when the sociological origins of such behavior were emphasized rather than biological ones or no explanation was given.

### ***Causes of Essentialism***

While the correlates and consequences of essentialist thinking are reasonably well documented, the causes of essentialist thinking have received comparatively less attention. Within the social psychological literature, a variety of explanations have been offered for when and why people might be drawn into essentialist thinking about social groups. Such explanations vary in the degree to which they impute neutral versus negative motivations to essentialism. For example, some work has focused on the perceptual

origins of essentialism (Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001). When people perceive a high degree of similarity between members of a particular group (i.e., the group is highly entitative), they are likely to search for an underlying explanation for that similarity, a search that often results in essentialism. In this sense, essentialism can be a perceptual product of surface similarities. In the context of gender, the ways in which gender is physically and socially marked is likely to reinforce the perception of similarities within gender groups, and differences between them, undoubtedly contributing to the fact that gender is typically understood in essentialized terms.

Other than its perceptual origins, essentialism has also been theorized as a form of motivated social cognition. The idea here is that people come to endorse essentialist ideas because these ideas are somehow functional for them. For example, researchers have noted that essentialist ideas seem well suited to ordering the social world and explaining differences between people. Because of this, essentialist beliefs may be particularly satisfying for people who are situationally or chronically high in the need to simplify and order their world. Consistent with this, research shows that essentialist beliefs are correlated with individual differences in the need for closure, and that the tendency to essentialize intergroup distinctions increases when such needs are experimentally activated (Roets & van Hiel, 2011).

In addition to serving distinct individual needs (e.g., for order and predictability), essentialist beliefs might also serve a variety of group-based needs. Perhaps the most prevalent line of thinking in this regard draws on ideas from system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) to argue that essentialist ideas can become appealing as a means to rationalize current social arrangements by making these appear natural and therefore justified (Yzerbyt, Estrada, Corneille, Seron, & Demoulin, 2004; Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadron, 1997). In the specific context of gender, the notion that men and women have some natural

complementarity has been noted as a feature of sexist ideologies and as something that contributes to the perceived legitimacy of gender inequality (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jackman, 1996; Jost & Kay, 2005).

Empirically, too, there is evidence that higher status groups tend to endorse essentialist ideas more strongly than their lower status counterparts. For example, within the Indian caste system, higher-caste individuals are more likely to explain caste in terms of underlying biology than are lower-caste individuals (Mahalingam, 2003); and university students from higher-status majors are more likely to endorse biological determinism than students from lower-status majors (Keller, 2005). Consistent with the underlying logic of system justification theory, higher-status groups should be most motivated to rationalize and justify the social structures from which they benefit. In the context of gender, this logic would suggest that men (as the dominant gender) should be more likely to endorse a biological perspective on gender than women. Indeed, there is also some evidence for this (e.g., Cole, Jayaratne, Cecchi, Feldbaum, & Petty, 2007).

The above explanations combine to suggest that essentialist thinking is an inevitable feature of certain individuals (e.g., those high in need for cognitive closure) and certain groups (i.e., higher status ones). However, given that essentialist ideas are typically expressed in intergroup contexts, contexts that are dynamic and variable, it seems that the appeal of essentialist ideas might also fluctuate depending on the specific social context within which these ideas are considered. The idea that essentialist thinking might be a variable and context-dependent feature of intergroup relations is broadly in line with the social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see Haslam, 2004, for a recent summary). Briefly, this theory argues that people derive an important aspect of their identity from group memberships. Because of this, people are assumed to be motivated by the desire to perceive their own groups (i.e., ingroups) more positively than other comparison groups (i.e., outgroups).

One straightforward prediction that arises from the social identity perspective is that people will be drawn to essentialist ideas when these reflect positively on their group membership. Illustrative of this, Morton, Haslam, Postmes, and Ryan (2006) explored people's evaluations of gender difference research as a function of how it interpreted a specific gender difference (i.e., pro-male or pro-female) and whether this difference was revealed through patterns of brain activation (i.e., located in male and female brains, a more essentialist explanation) or through in-depth interviews (i.e., social preferences, a more social explanation). The findings showed that both men and women evaluated research more positively when it affirmed their gender identity, and to a lesser extent when such findings were revealed by neuroscientific rather than social scientific methods.

The above studies suggest that the acceptance of essentialist ideas is guided in part by the content of what is being essentialized – namely, whether that content reflects positively or negatively on people's (social) self. Another way in which identity concerns might guide people's engagement with essentialist ideas is in response to the broader intergroup context within which such ideas are being considered. In addition to the general desire to perceive ingroups positively, the social identity perspective highlights the dynamic ways in which intergroup relations activate different identity-based motives and guide their expression. Within this theory, one important feature of intergroup relations is not just the degree to which these confer higher or lower status on one's ingroup, but also whether that status position is perceived as secure versus threatened. Particularly when people consider intergroup relations from a position of threatened higher status, they are likely to engage in modes of thought and behavior aimed at defending their group's threatened position (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Haslam, 2004; Hornsey, Spears, Cremers, & Hogg, 2003).

Along these lines, research has also shown that men's endorsement of biological theories of gender difference, and their assessments of scientific research that might reveal such differences (e.g., in terms of whether it was interesting, valuable, and deserving of further funding), varies according to both individual differences in sexism and how the broader context of gender relations in society is portrayed in terms of stability versus change (Morton, Postmes, Haslam, & Hornsey, 2009). Specifically, sexist attitudes predicted men's endorsement of biological theories of gender differences only when men's higher status relative to women was portrayed as under threat from social change, for example by giving participants information about women's growing attainments and the narrowing of the gender gap in key domains. When men's higher status was instead portrayed as stable and secure, this positive relationship between sexism and measures of essentialist thinking about gender disappeared or indeed reversed on some indicators. Interestingly, this was also the case when status relations were portrayed as having actually changed, and women were presented as now being advantaged over men in a number of domains.

These patterns suggest that prejudiced members of high-status groups might be particularly inclined to engage with essentialist thought when such thinking has utility to them. When the higher status of one's group is being eroded, marking group boundaries strongly, and locating these in the fundamentals of biology, might mitigate against this threat because it suggests that things will never really change. In comparison, when status positions are secure, there may be little need to engage with such thinking. Equally, when one's group moves from advantage to disadvantage, essentialist thinking may lose its appeal because it solidifies this negative position within the new social structure. Together, these patterns highlight the dynamic – and group-based – nature of essentialist thought (see also Morton, Hornsey, & Postmes, 2009).

### ***Alternative Essences***

What is apparent from the above is that much of the work on essentialism focuses on the possible causes of essentialist thinking among majority or dominant groups (e.g., men, cultural majorities) and the consequences of essentialist thinking for minority or subordinated groups (e.g., women, cultural minorities). Implicitly, dominant groups are essentializers and the dominated suffer under essentialism. The motivations that might guide essentialist thinking among minority or subordinated groups, and the meaning of this from their perspective, has received little attention and is poorly understood (Yzerbyt et al., 2004). As essentialist ideas often do have negative consequences for minorities, it seems reasonable to assume that minority group members would consistently reject essentialist ideas whenever and wherever these occur. However, a moment's reflection on the scientific and political debates that were summarized in the previous sections of this chapter would suggest that the reality is more complex than this. Sometimes minorities are also drawn to essentialist thinking. As such, it would seem important to understand the appeal of such ideas from a minority perspective.

Within the psychological literature, discussions of minority essentialism often attribute this to the same motivational forces that guide majority essentialism. For example, the ideological motive of system justification is theorized to be equally applicable to minority and subordinated groups as it is to the majority and dominant groups: members of the minority can be as invested in social systems that oppress them as the majority is in maintaining such systems of oppression (Jost & Banaji, 1994). This reasoning has been used to explain instances in which minorities endorse essentialist ideas as strongly as their higher-status counterparts (e.g., when women endorse biological determinism to the same degree as men: Keller, 2005, p. 699; or when ethnic minorities endorse more essentialist opinions about differences in attainment than

majorities: Shostak, Freese, Link, & Phelan, 2009). Alternatively, theorists have noted that the discriminatory treatment that is often conferred on minority groups is a strong reminder of the homogeneity of that group (i.e., entitativity), something that might also reinforce essentialist perceptions of group membership (Yzerbyt et al., 2004).

While minority essentialism might well be the product of these negative or regressive motivations, it also seems plausible that minority essentialism might sometimes be guided by a more progressive agenda. A handful of studies suggest that minorities do sometimes engage with essentialist ideas and that this may not be driven by a simple desire to rationalize their lower status. For example, discursive work by Verkuyten (2003) observed that ethnic minorities variably essentialized and de-essentialized their identities in response to talk of assimilation and discrimination. While essentialism seemed to be avoided in discussion of discrimination (i.e., to undermine the legitimacy of differential treatment), ethnic identity was readily essentialized in response to talk of assimilation (i.e., to assert and protect their identity in relation to the majority; see also Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). Similar patterns were observed in experimental work by Morton and Postmes (2009), which found that highly identified members of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community were more likely to endorse a view of sexuality as natural and inherent after considering the ways in which their group is marginalized and ignored by the majority, but not when they instead considered the ways in which they are discriminated against and devalued. Again, this suggests that essentialism can take on different meanings depending on the context of majority treatment: When one's identity is being ignored or overlooked, essentialism might be a powerful argument for recognition. Along these lines, it is also worth noting that in the study by Morton and Postmes essentialist beliefs were positively correlated with feelings of self-efficacy, suggesting that these beliefs were experienced as empowering.



A recent study suggests that progressive motives might also sometimes underlie women's endorsement of essentialist ideas about gender. Although our previous research suggested that women's endorsement of essentialist beliefs was not as responsive to the intergroup context as men's (Morton et al., 2009), in subsequent work we have considered whether endorsement might further depend on the identity of the audience to which such beliefs were being expressed. We reasoned that while essentialist notions often take on negative meaning for women in intergroup contexts (i.e., because of their association with discrimination: Morton & Postmes, 2009; Verkuyten, 2003), the meaning of such ideas might become more positive when considered in intragroup contexts. Within group boundaries, essentialist ideas can suggest a fundamental connection between women, something that might be particularly useful for mobilizing the collective toward social change. Accordingly, women might be drawn to essentialist ideas within group boundaries and when social change is seen to be possible. Reflecting the operation of identity-based motives, this pattern was expected to be most evident among highly identified women.

To explore this idea, we invited women to complete an online survey (Morton & Postmes, 2011). This survey varied the gender identity of the researcher (i.e., male or female), and thereby the implied audience for participant's responses, and the degree to which women's lower societal status was portrayed as stable versus open to change. We then measured essentialist beliefs about gender (based on items assessing whether differences between men and women were large, fundamental, and biologically determined) and women's identification with their gender group. The results revealed an interaction among identification, societal context, and audience on endorsement of essentialist beliefs about gender. While identification was uncorrelated with endorsement in all other conditions, when social change was portrayed as possible and the

audience for such beliefs was another woman, highly identified women were significantly more likely to endorse essentialist beliefs about gender than their less identified counterparts. This pattern shows that highly identified women can sometimes be drawn to essentialism – specifically under circumstances in which essentialist ideas might be useful for reinforcing connections to other women and mobilizing them toward social change.

In sum, the above review suggests a number of negative consequences that typically follow when ideas about fundamental, natural differences between men and women filter into the public domain. In particular, focusing people's attention on natural differences creates expectations about how men and women will and should behave, thus underscoring stereotypes. By linking such stereotypes to gendered bodies, essentialist thinking can also structure the gendered self and result in more stereotype-consistent behavior. For these reasons, some researchers in this area have suggested that the best response to essentialism about social groups, including gender, is to always 'raise our vigilance when biological determinist ideas are proposed' (Keller, 2005, p. 700).

Ultimately, this may be sound advice. However, there is also evidence that essentialist ideas can be approached from a variety of perspectives and that it is not always possible to equate the endorsement of essentialist ideas with an oppressive agenda. While gender-based essentialism may be a hallmark of male sexism, sometimes sexist men reject essentialist ideas. Likewise, while members of dominated groups and minorities might typically be suspicious of essentialist accounts of their identity, especially when these are offered by others, there are conditions under which essentialism might be appealing from their perspective. At some level, then, ordinary people behave like 'strategic essentialists' who sometimes engage with essentialism yet at other times disengage with it. As such, the fluid nature of essentialist ideas, and the various meanings these might contain would seem

to be an important part of the picture, and a potentially interesting focus for further research and understanding.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have reviewed a range of elements that relate to the essentialization of gender categories: scientific, political, and psychological. In each of these areas it can be seen that the way in which people think about and engage with ideas about the existence and origin of differences between men and women is often more complex than it immediately seems. Across all domains, I suggest that simply equating individual positions on these issues with certain socio-political orientations (e.g., sexism), social identities (e.g., male or female), or social positions (e.g., majority versus minority) does not seem fully tenable. Rather, the positions people take on the question of gender differences, and from where these arise, exist within a broader debate. The parameters of that debate extend beyond individual differences in attitude or personality, and are further structured by people's identities (i.e., as male or female) and how these identities are situated within the broader social and societal context. And, as with all debates, these parameters shift and change and so too do people's positions within them.

Although this chapter has separately considered the way this debate is represented in scientific work, political discussions, and individual thinking, it seems likely that these domains more often converge than they separate. The scientific study of gender difference is framed by the political context of gender relations in society and individual scientists are as much psychological actors in that context as ordinary people are. While psychologists have tended to focus either on exploring the basis of gender differences or studying the ways in which ordinary people think about similar ideas, less attention is paid to the social psychology of science itself. An

interesting way to take research on these themes forward into the future would be to apply some of the insights gained from the study of ordinary people to the analysis of science in this domain. That is, rather than seeing the scientific study of gender differences as a separate enterprise to the investigation of lay beliefs about gender, and both of these as distinct from the political literatures that have grappled with the meaning of difference, it would be useful and interesting to further explore the intersections between these activities.

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PART V

# Gender and Social Issues





# Monstrously Mortal: Women's Bodies, Existential Threat, and Women's Health Risks

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## INTRODUCTION

From an existential perspective, and terror management theory in particular, fear of death, and the need to manage that fear, is a central force guiding much of human behavior. We use this as a starting place for our chapter, and explain how this perspective can inform both the condemnation and objectification of women's bodies – both by others and women themselves – and consequent risks to women's physical health. In particular, our framework sheds light on the avoidance of certain health behaviors that involve intimate confrontations with the physical body (e.g., breast exams and mammography) and also engagement in health risk behaviors aimed at attaining a culturally ideal body (e.g., dieting, tanning, smoking). Ironically, our perspective implies that existential mortality concerns can underlie a number of behaviors that ultimately endanger women's health.

## FEAR OF DEATH

In synthesizing views from existential philosophy, along with evolutionary and psychoanalytic theory, Ernest Becker (1973) came to the conclusion that human beings face a unique and potentially terrifying existential dilemma. They want to live, but yet are cognizant of the inevitable fact that, in the end (or sooner), they will be confronted with death. Becker went on to suggest that the same capabilities of the human mind that render individuals aware of death also provide them with the tools to deny it. The ability to reflect on the self and the world in an abstract and symbolic manner enables people to create abstract, symbolic cultural representations of the world. It is by virtue of this symbolic solution that people manage the potential for terror associated with the fear of death.

On the basis of these ideas, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, and Solomon (1986) developed terror management theory. They reasoned

that, to the extent that cultural beliefs and values function to ameliorate existential concerns associated with mortality, people should cling to their cultural beliefs and strive to attain standards of value more tenaciously when reminded of death. To date, some three hundred experimental studies have supported this hypothesis (see Burke, Martens, & Faucher, 2010, for a recent meta-analysis). For example, when people are primed with thoughts of their mortality (called *mortality salience*) they conform more to cultural standards (e.g., materialism; Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004) and experience greater distress when forced to transgress against cultural values (e.g., desecrate an American flag; Greenberg, Porteus, Simon, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1995). Mortality salience has been shown to lead people to defend their cultural views by derogating, and even aggressing against, other people who hold different beliefs (e.g., McGregor et al., 1998). Also supporting the position that cultural views provide protection from mortality concerns, when people's cultural views are challenged (in the absence of a mortality salience manipulation) thoughts of death become cognitively more accessible (Schimmel, Hayes, Williams, & Jahrig, 2007). Taken together, there is strong empirical support for the position that concern about mortality underlies people's investment in their cultural worlds.

## THE BODY PROBLEM

Thus, human beings manage concerns about death through cultural meaning and their symbolic value within the culture. But, humans are not only symbolic beings; they are physical creatures as well. Herein lies the problem. The body is a reminder of human physicality and, by virtue of this, the inevitability of mortality. In support of this position, there is a growing cache of literature demonstrating that the body poses a problem for humans, particularly in the context of salient concerns about being a mortal creature (see

Goldenberg, 2005; Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2000). For example, mortality reminders have been found to decrease acceptance of the theory of evolution by natural selection (Tracy, Hart, & Martens, 2011) and to increase preference for an essay that highlights human uniqueness from other animals relative to an essay that focuses on their biological similarities (Goldenberg et al., 2001). Moreover, when people are primed with existential concerns – either mortality salience or reminders of the similarities between humans and other animals (hereafter referred to as *human creatureliness*), or both – they respond by distancing from the physical body, including reporting less interest in the physical aspects of sex (Goldenberg, Cox, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 2002; Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, McCoy, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1999), expressing more disgust toward bodily products (Goldenberg et al., 2001), and avoiding bodily sensation and experiences (e.g., a foot massage; Goldenberg et al., 2006; Goldenberg, Heflick, & Cooper, 2008). In addition, highlighting the physical aspects of sex or the body has been found to make thoughts of death implicitly accessible (Cox, Goldenberg, Pyszczynski, & Weise, 2007; Goldenberg et al., 2002).

## WOMEN'S BODIES AS A SPECIAL PROBLEM

This chapter is specifically about women, however. Obviously women are not unique in having bodies, but theologians and philosophers have long argued that women are more associated with, and burdened by, the body; and indeed there are aspects of women's bodies that are unique. Specifically, when it comes to the continuation of the species (one of, if not *the*, most basic biological function of any creature), women carry the far greater responsibility. Both men and women can invest their time and care to provide for offspring, but the role of women's bodily investment is obligatory and costly in

terms of resources (Trivers, 1972). Women menstruate from puberty through menopause; once pregnant, they carry the fetus in their body for nine months, then experience labor and childbirth; and after the baby is born, their body continues to provide for it with lactation.

To the extent that recognition of human creatureliness undermines existential security, women's bodies, and their reproductive functions specifically, should inspire reactions that are marked with some antipathy (see Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004, 2010). Western thought traditions have long viewed the soul or the mind to be superior to the physical body; and therefore women, assumed to be subject to the whims of their body, have been attributed lower status, closer to that of animals (Bark-Yi, 2007; Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996). Plato wrote that men would be reincarnated as women (and subsequently animals) if they were unable to control their emotions; and specifically, women's emotional weakness was said to be a result of her 'wandering uterus' searching for a fetus (Delaney, Lupton, & Toth, 1988). Aristotle believed a woman's only contribution to reproduction was to provide the physical body of the fetus; men were responsible for providing the spirit or soul of the child (Delaney et al., 1988). Even in the 19th and early 20th centuries the prevailing medical opinion was that women were controlled by their reproductive hormones, rendering them incapable of intellect or logical reasoning (Fausto-Sterling, 1992; Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996). In the Christian tradition, where lust represents a perilous temptation, women are considered its physical embodiment; many Buddhist texts regard women's bodies as polluted and morally defective; and Orthodox Jewish men thank God every day that they were not born in the body of a woman (Gilmore, 2001).

It follows that when women are devalued, it will often be in association with their physical bodies, and reproductive functions in particular. Anthropological and historical evidence for this abounds. The most striking

example is perhaps seen in the taboos and regulations associated with menstruation. Ranging from physical isolation, to restricted activities, to purification or hygiene rituals, negative reactions are longstanding and universal. The Kolosh Indians of Alaska, for example, confined menarcheal girls to small huts for one year, and Australian Aborigines reportedly buried menstruating women in the sand to confine the dangers of their menstrual blood (Delaney et al., 1988). Similarly, the Mae Enga of New Guinea believed menstrual blood was so dangerous that mere contact with it could sicken and even kill a man (Delaney et al., 1988). Eskimo men were not permitted to have contact with a menstruating woman prior to hunting because it was believed that an invisible vapor would attach itself to the man, making him visible to game, and Bukka women were forbidden from going into the sea for fear that menstrual blood would spoil the fish (Delaney et al., 1988; Knight, 1991).

Belief in the polluting qualities of menstrual blood extends from less to more developed societies, and from the ancient world to the present day. Scientists in the 1920s conducted a study in which they erroneously concluded that menstrual blood contained 'menotoxins' capable of killing plants (Knight, 1991). In the 19th century it was widely accepted that sexual contact with a menstruating woman could result in contracting venereal diseases, and Judeo-Christian literature states that touching a menstruating woman sexually would result in becoming unclean and cut off from society. This warning is still observed by many Orthodox Jews, who require that a woman be cleansed in a *mikveh*, or ritual bath, after her menstrual cycle (Delaney et al., 1988; Steinberg, 1997). Modern Muslim women who are menstruating are not permitted to recite the five daily ritual prayers, to visit a mosque, must abstain from fasting during Ramadan, and must not touch or recite directly from the Qur'an (Guterman, Mehta, & Gibbs, 2008). In Hinduism, menstruating women are isolated as untouchables (Leslie, 1991). They can do no work, must not comb



their hair, bathe, or touch water or fire sources, and are restricted from sharing spaces with others (Nagarajan, 2007).

Although women in contemporary secular Western societies are not subject to such extreme taboos, negative attitudes towards menstruation still exist, and secrecy and isolation are still practiced. Women are taught that menstruation must be concealed and managed with hygiene products to avoid being 'discovered', and empirical evidence has shown that both men and women display disgust reactions towards even a new, unwrapped tampon, refusing to touch it to their lips when asked (Lee & Sasser-Coen, 1996; Rozin, Haidt, McCauley, Dunlop, & Ashmore, 1999). Moreover, in a study designed to test more implicit reactions to menstruation, Roberts, Goldenberg, Power, and Pyszczynski (2002) found that when a woman inadvertently dropped a wrapped tampon from her bag she was viewed as less competent and less likable by both men and women compared to when she dropped a less odious, but equally feminine, item – a hair clip – from her bag. The mere presence of the tampon resulted additionally in participants physically distancing themselves from the woman by sitting farther away from her.

Cultural scorn toward women's reproductive functions is not limited to menstruation, however, but extends to such seemingly idealized feminine experiences as pregnancy and breastfeeding. Yes, women have been celebrated for their ability to bear children and provide sustenance to their young, but only when the most corporeal aspects of these activities are concealed. In Hindu cultures childbirth is believed to be a highly polluting event, with the birth confined to a secluded part of the house, and a midwife from the lowest caste (who is also believed to be 'polluting' because of her status in society), the only person in attendance (Thompson, 1985). Kariate Jewish women are considered impure following childbirth, during which time they are forbidden from entering the synagogue, visiting a cemetery, or having sexual intercourse (for fear that their impurity

would be transferred to their husbands; Tsoffar, 2004). In Western society the picture is very much the same. In 1991 Demi Moore caused a flurry of controversy over posing nude on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine while pregnant, but only a year later, a similarly nude, not-pregnant Moore appeared on the cover with little talk of indecency (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2010; *Vanity Fair*, 1991, 1992). During the 2004 Summer Olympics a woman was pictured with an exposed pregnant belly at the opening ceremonies, after which the Federal Communications Commission received several complaints of 'indecency' (de Moraes, 2004). Even pregnant dolls are controversial: When toy-maker Mattel introduced Barbie's happily married and pregnant friend, Midge, it sparked outrage among many parents, forcing retailers to pull the doll from their shelves (Associated Press, 2002).

Breastfeeding too is, on the surface, highly valued, and considered by medical professionals to be the healthiest option for both mother and baby (Walker, 1993). However, breastfeeding and breast milk can also elicit very negative reactions. Many Eastern cultures consider the colostrum, a thick milk substance produced immediately after birth, to be poisonous (note the World Health Organization states that this substance is actually highly beneficial to a newborn; Reissland & Burghart, 1988). In Western society, breastfeeding can be a source of controversy and inspire negative reactions when not confined to the appropriate setting. Women have been asked to leave various establishments, including restaurants and retail stores, for breastfeeding in public (Gregorian, 2010; Lee-Murphy, 2011). In 2006, *Baby Talk* magazine sparked outrage when it pictured a baby nursing from a breast on its cover (Associated Press, 2006). Just recently, a London restaurant made international headlines when it began selling ice cream made from breast milk, and even prompted officials to ban the sale of it because of customer concern that the milk could be contaminated (even though it had

been thoroughly screened; Associated Press, 2011). Empirical research has provided additional evidence confirming that people view breast milk, and especially the thought of an adult ingesting it, with disgust (Bramswell, 2001; Fallon & Rozin, 1983).

The preponderance of evidence depicting negative attitudes towards women's bodies, and specifically their natural, reproductive aspects (e.g., lactating breasts), is consistent with our position that, perhaps ironically, women's association with life-giving poses a psychological threat. But clearly it is not conclusive. Experimental research wherein the existential concerns are heightened and negative reactions to these features of women's bodies are heightened, in turn, is critical to make this case. Although to date there are no studies of which we are aware that target menstruation, there is evidence that both pregnancy and breastfeeding are more negatively viewed when existential concerns have been heightened.

With regard to pregnancy, Goldenberg, Cox, Arndt, and Goplen (2007) found that priming human creatureliness with an essay highlighting the similarities between humans and animals led to increased negative reactions towards the aforementioned *Vanity Fair* magazine cover depicting a pregnant, nude Demi Moore, but did not affect reactions to a similar, non-pregnant image of her. Moreover, such reactions are not restricted to an exposed pregnant belly (and thus, cannot be attributed to a taboo associated with exposure). A second study found that the same human creatureliness prime caused participants to view a fully clothed, pregnant Gwyneth Paltrow as less competent than when they were exposed to a non-pregnant, similarly clad, image of her.

In a series of studies, Cox, Goldenberg, Arndt, and Pyszczynski (2007) confirmed a direct link between breastfeeding and existential mortality concerns. In the first study, priming mortality salience, using the standard manipulation (two open-ended questions asking participants to contemplate their own death), led participants to view breastfeeding in public as a more severe offense than when

mortality was not primed. In a second study, participants were told that a purported female task partner was breastfeeding or bottle feeding her baby in the next room. When mortality was primed, they were not only expected to like the breastfeeding woman less (whereas attitudes toward the bottle-feeding woman were unaffected), but they also physically avoided her by positioning their chairs further apart for an alleged future interaction task. In a third study, the researchers established that it is concerns about creatureliness (in response to breastfeeding) that pose a salient threat in the context of mortality salience (and not merely that mortality concerns promote any effort to adhere to cultural norms). In this study, when mortality was primed and participants expected to interact with a breastfeeding (compared to bottle-feeding) partner, they responded to a word fragment completion task with more creaturely-related words (e.g., CREAT \_ \_ E with 'creature' rather than 'creative'). A final study found that participants had increased negative reactions to a *Redbook* magazine cover depicting actor Pierce Brosnan with his wife breastfeeding their infant after they were primed with the human creatureliness essay, but did not show the same reactions upon viewing a similar picture sans the breastfeeding.

So historical, anthropological, and empirical psychological evidence indicates that women are not only celebrated for their role as child bearers, mothers, and men's sexual partners, but also are feared and devalued for these same qualities. The current theoretical perspective argues that women's unique role in reproduction makes salient the corporeal, animalistic aspects of the human body, and this is a particular problem in the context of a need to manage fears about death.

## OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN'S BODIES

As Glick and Fiske (2011) so convincingly demonstrated, perhaps more visibly evident in secular Western society is not strict

condemnation or hostility toward women and their bodies, but rather a great deal of seemingly benevolent displays of and commentary around idealized women's bodies. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) argued that the sexual objectification of women's bodies is the cultural milieu in which girls develop, and this leads to an internalization of an objectified standard on females' physical selves, called 'self-objectification'. Some theorists argue that this objectification is a reflection of evolutionarily adaptive strategies for assessing fertility (e.g., Buss, 2007). However, this explanation fails in several ways. First, as we will show, it is often precisely when the reproductive functions of women's bodies are removed entirely or sanitized that their depiction is deemed appropriate and even ideal. Second, if women's own self-objectification reflected a mating strategy, then they would desire a physical self that conforms to men's desires. Research shows, however, that women desire more thinness, for example, than men desire in them (Fallon & Rozin, 1985). Our perspective, informed by terror management theory, argues that objectification and self-objectification serve as a means to reduce the threat associated with the body generally, and women's bodies specifically, by imbuing the body and its functions with symbolic meaning and value. From this understanding, objectification of women's bodies can be understood as a strategy to reduce the threat inherent in them by transforming their creaturely physicality into something less threatening and more symbolic (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2004, 2010; see also Grabe, Chapter 25 this volume). This transformation is found across cultures, and although standards of what is considered beautiful or sexually appealing differ, the means of objectification are very much the same. Women's bodies become, in a sense, cultural objects, deemed acceptable only to the extent that their creaturely features are concealed and/or the body and its parts conform to particular cultural standards.

Take breasts, for example, arguably the most sexualized aspect of a woman's body. But breasts are attractive and desirable only under specific conditions. Stearns (1999) argues that the sexualized breast and the maternal breast are opposite ends of the same spectrum; one cannot exist in the same realm as the other. Case in point: a woman breast-feeding in public is considered indecent by most people, and women have even been asked to leave all kinds of public establishments (even obstetricians' offices!; Whitely, 2001) for doing so, but sexualized breasts routinely appear in PG-13-rated movies and even on primetime television with little talk of controversy (Wolf, 1991). Women cannot purchase nursing bras at Victoria's Secret, a store with all manner of bras that enhance the sexualized breast. The sexual objectification of breasts thus requires that they be separated from their mammalian function; only then are they publically consumable, culturally valued, appropriate objects of desire.

More generally, objectification implies that women's body parts can, and should, be evaluated and are expected to conform to specific cultural standards (Bartky, 1990). While modern Western societies favor large, high breasts, the Padung prefer them droopy (Wolf, 1991). And it is not just standards for women's breasts that vary. The Maori consider a fat vulva to be beautiful, whereas in Southwest Africa, elongated labia are regarded as beautiful and are achieved by pulling and weighting them (Buss, 1994). The longstanding Chinese tradition of foot binding is rooted in the belief that a three-inch long foot, curved upwards in a crescent moon shape represents the ideal of beauty, eroticism, and an outward symbol of refinement (Wang, 2000). In Burma, an elongated neck is the standard of beauty, and women stack heavy metal rings around their necks to weight the shoulders and make the neck appear longer (Lewis, 2010). Western society promotes an extremely thin body as the ideal shape, whereas in parts of Western Africa women are considered more attractive when they are heavy, and young girls are force-fed

enormous amounts of food, and even made to consume their own vomit should they reject it, as a way to make them desirable for marriage (Smith, 2009).

It is certainly the case that men's bodies are also modified or enhanced to meet cultural standards of masculine attractiveness. Approximately 30% of the world's population of males in several religious and some secular cultures are circumcised, despite no evidence for this practice to provide any health or virility benefits (Gollaher, 2000). Other cultural traditions include ritualized scarring or tattooing, specifically for male members (Coe, Harmon, Verner, & Tonn, 1993). However, these practices are fewer, are generally not mandatory within a culture, and do not tend to conform to a strict and narrow standard of acceptability (Jeffreys, 2000). Men, and manhood, in general, in contrast to women and womanhood, are judged or defined less by their physical, or biological experiences, and more by their social accomplishments (Vandello, Bosson, et al., 2008; see also Bosson, Vandello, & Caswell, Chapter 8 this volume).

Analyses of Western cultural outputs such as film, television, music videos, magazines, advertising, and marketing provide evidence that women's bodies are the targets of sexual objectification more often than men's (APA Task Force Report, 2007; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Media analyses show that the ubiquitous depictions of the female in the media are invariably focused on the body, or even on dismembered parts of the body, and not the whole person; and that this treatment of the body as a mere object is far less common in depictions of men in the media (APA Task Force Report, 2007). Further, women are gazed at more often than men in interpersonal relationships, and men direct more unreciprocated stares towards women than vice versa (Argyle & Williams, 1969; Cary, 1978). Moreover, when people focus on the appearance of women as compared to men, women uniquely suffer consequences that are indicative of being objectified. Specifically, women are perceived as less

warm, competent, moral, and more generally less characteristically human as a function of focusing on their appearance (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2009; Heflick, Goldenberg, Cooper, & Puvia, 2011).

Clearly, women are objectified. But is there any empirical evidence for our assertion that objectification of women is indeed a response to reminders of women's creaturely nature? Indeed, there is. In the Roberts et al. (2002) study where a woman dropped a tampon (or not), male and female participants responded by not only devaluing and distancing from the particular female target, but also with a greater tendency to value physical appearance in women generally over physical competence, that is, to objectify women (cf. Noll & Fredrickson, 1998). Moreover, gender schematic (both male and female) participants in this study were the ones driving this effect, suggesting that it is people who conform to the societal expectation for gender that are especially invested in the objectification of women as a response to creatureliness. It is notable that the effect of dropping the tampon was greater relative to dropping a hair clip, a prime that should be especially likely to highlight the importance of women's appearance. In sum, in addition to a hefty body of historical and anthropological evidence depicting both condemnation and objectification of women's bodies, there is also empirical evidence suggesting that objectification is a defensive response to women's creatureliness.

Moreover, according to objectification theory, this cultural milieu coaxes girls and women to internalize a sexually objectifying point of view on their own bodies, to 'self-objectify' (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), taking on a third person perspective, working hard to make their bodies conform to the – often impossible – societal ideals, and experiencing negative emotional and cognitive consequences (Moradi & Huang, 2008). From the existential perspective we have put forth, it makes sense that women, too, participate in the flight from their natural creatureliness, and emphasize and monitor their own bodies'

appearance (and that of other women). To the extent that objectification strips women of their inherent creatureliness, women should be prone to self-objectify when their reproductive functions have been made salient, especially in response to mortality reminders. Indeed, we have just completed a study in which priming mortality salience caused women, but not men, to score higher on a measure of self-objectification (again, valuing their body's appearance more than its competence) after viewing a photograph of a pregnant woman compared to the same woman (dressed identically) prior to pregnancy (Morris, Goldenberg, & Heflick, 2013). Thus, objectification by others and self-objectification by women themselves can be understood as a defense against the reproductive aspects of women's bodies.

## CONSEQUENCES FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

To be clear, our position is that objectification serves an existential psychic function, not that objectification is good. Indeed, ample evidence strongly suggests that objectification and self-objectification are harmful for women (Moradi & Huang, 2008). We have already seen that women suffer negative perceptions and reactions from others when their physical nature is revealed – for example, their menstrual status, being pregnant, or nursing. But is women's health at risk on account of such forces? Our framework helps illuminate ways in which women avoid certain health behaviors that involve intimate confrontations with their creaturely, non-objectified, symbolically naked bodies, and also engage in behaviors aimed at attaining a culturally ideal body (e.g., dieting, tanning, smoking) that put their health at risk, and that they do so especially when mortality concerns are primed.

### *The Naked Body*

As we have already emphasized, women's bodies are an especially salient reminder of humankind's creaturely, mortal existence.

However, for women, many health behaviors involve confrontation with the physical, creaturely body in ways that strip away the symbolic 'drapery' of objectification, leaving women symbolically naked. Moreover, many of these health behaviors function to detect or prevent potentially fatal health concerns. Thus, women not only have to confront their physical body but also must do so in a fashion that makes its vulnerable and its mortal nature salient. It follows then, that the threat posed by the physicality of women's bodies can become a barrier to these healthy behaviors.

In support of this reasoning, Goldenberg, Arndt, Hart, and Routledge (2008, Study 2) found that conducting a breast exam on a breast model increased death-thought accessibility, suggesting that engaging in health behaviors associated with one's physical body increases existential concerns. Moreover, these heightened existential concerns led women primed with human creatureliness (using the previously described human–animal similarity essays) to conduct a breast exam on a model for a shorter duration than women reminded of human uniqueness or who received no prime. Not only do women spend less time conducting a breast exam, but existential concerns may lead women to avoid the health behavior altogether. Goldenberg, Arndt et al. (2008, Study 1) found that women primed with mortality reported lower intentions to conduct breast self-exams when they were primed with a creatureliness reminder compared to human uniqueness.

Health behaviors that involve confrontations with the physical body may be especially problematic for women high in neuroticism, presumably because they already have difficulty using symbolic defenses to defuse the existential concerns associated with the physical body (see, e.g., Goldenberg et al., 2006). In support of this hypothesis, Goldenberg, Routledge, and Arndt (2009) found that among women high in neuroticism, priming mortality subsequent to a reminder of human creatureliness



decreased women's willingness to vicariously experience, or put themselves in the shoes of a woman describing receiving, a mammogram. Moreover, in a second study, among women at a mammography clinic, high neurotics expressed greater discomfort after a mammogram procedure when they were reminded of creatureliness before undergoing the procedure.

We have already seen that attitudes toward breastfeeding can be quite negative when concerns about mortality and/or creatureliness are salient (Cox, Goldenberg, & Arndt, 2007). Other research has demonstrated that to the extent that women emphasize a more sexually objectified perspective on their own bodies (that breasts are 'for men', for example), they feel more shame about breastfeeding, believe that breastfeeding will negatively impact their sexuality (Johnston-Robledo, Wares, Fricker, & Pasek, 2007), and are less likely actually to opt to breastfeed their babies (Morse, 1989). Furthermore, to the extent that men sexually objectify women, they are also less likely to endorse women's breastfeeding (Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2006), which undoubtedly has a negative impact on their partners actually doing so. Considering that breastfeeding is not only the healthiest way to nourish a baby (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011) but has also been linked to a lowered risk of breast and ovarian cancer and Type 2 diabetes among mothers (www.womenshealth.gov), this work highlights another potential health consequence for women (and their babies).

To the extent that self-objectification involves a kind of 'fleeing' from the creaturely aspects of women's own bodies (emphasizing the sexualized breast, as opposed to the mammalian breast, for example), some other potential health risks may be expected to be related to women's reproductive bodies, especially for women highly invested in objectification as a defense. In the arena of sexual health, for example, studies show that adolescent girls with a more objectified view of their bodies are less likely

to be sexually assertive, resulting in decreased condom use, and hence increased risk for sexually transmitted disease (Impett, Schooler, & Tolman, 2006). Higher self-objectification also predicts more negative emotions and attitudes toward menstruation, such as disgust and shame (Johnston-Robledo et al., 2007; Roberts, 2004), and these feelings are associated with interest in menstrual suppression via pharmaceutical means (Johnston-Robledo et al., 2003), the health risks of which have yet to be determined. Finally, in developed countries, women's requests for cesarean delivery in the absence of medical necessity are on the rise (Andrist, 2008), leading *Time* magazine to ask whether some modern women are 'too posh to push' (*Time*, 2004). Cesarean delivery is a surgical procedure, with its attendant risks. Although there are little data to speculate why women choose cesarean delivery when it is not medically necessary, one content analysis of media coverage regarding reasons women do so linked it with self-objectification's solution to the creaturely body, concluding that 'if women treat their bodies as objects, surgical birth becomes not only acceptable, but also reasonable' (Andrist, 2008, p. 561). Indeed, it is wealthy women delivering in private clinics who are largely responsible for this rise, leading to speculation that it has become a cosmetic procedure (*Time*, 2004).

### ***The Body Ideal***

There is the potential for health risks not only in threats associated with women's natural, non-objectified, bodies, but also in women's unnatural, objectified bodies, and more specifically, in women's own efforts, and the myriad procedures made available to them, to make their bodies conform to an objectified ideal. As we have highlighted, the standards are often so specific (e.g., elongated necks or labia, depending on the culture) that the majority of real living, breathing women, cannot possibly attain them. Studies of the reasons women opt for a wide variety of cosmetic surgeries, from rhinoplasty to vaginoplasty

and labiaplasty, support our contention that self-objectification serves as a motivating force for these potentially fatal risks to women's health (e.g., Calogero, Pina, Park, & Rahemtulla, 2010; Liao & Creighton, 2007). From the perspective of terror management theory, highlighting mortality concerns should increase the motivation to adhere to societal standards of beauty, even if the behaviors that allow women to meet these standards make them *more* vulnerable to the very threat they are aiming to avoid.

One such enduring societal standard imposed on women in Western culture, and beyond (e.g., Tsai, Curbow, & Heinberg, 2003), is the need to be thin. From magazines to television, women are consistently exposed to the message that being thin is attractive (Wolf, 1991). Not surprisingly, then, many women turn to extreme, and often dangerous, dieting techniques in order to meet the thin ideal (e.g., 39% of women have used diet pills and 23% have gone on crash diets; CBS News, 2011). From our perspective, these behaviors represent women's attempts to mitigate existential concerns through the pursuit of the objectified ideal.

In line with our position, Goldenberg, Arndt, Hart, and Brown (2005) demonstrated that priming mortality concerns decreased women's (but not men's) consumption of a nutritious but fattening snack. When the study was replicated in an (all-female) group setting (in which social comparison was likely), only women who were relatively less successful attaining the thin ideal (i.e., high body-mass index, BMI) restricted eating after mortality salience, presumably as a result of comparing unfavorably with their peers. In a final study, the authors measured participants' perceived discrepancy from the thin ideal and found that, indeed, mortality salience caused high BMI women to perceive themselves as more discrepant from the ideal and this discrepancy mediated the interaction between mortality salience and BMI on eating behavior. Thus, priming mortality was found to affect women's behavior in ways that may adversely affect their health, and

this research specifically demonstrated mortality reminders exacerbated the effect by increasing women's perceived failure to attain a societal ideal for women's bodies.

A health risk for women directly related to Western culture's emphasis on thinness is smoking. Studies have established a clear link between body dissatisfaction and the onset of cigarette smoking among adolescent girls (Stice & Shaw, 2003). This link has been attributed to the media's portrayal of certain cigarettes targeted to female audiences (e.g., 'Virginia Slims') as glamour-enhancing and weight control mechanisms (Hammond, Doxey, Daniel, & Bansal-Travers, 2011). Research has shown that this relationship is mediated by self-objectification – women who are smokers score higher in self-objectification than do non-smokers (Harrell, Fredrickson, Pomerleau, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2006). Exacerbating smoking's harmfulness to respiratory and heart health, young women who smoke engage in more dieting and disordered eating behaviors than do non-smokers (Croll, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, & Ireland, 2002).

In addition to the expectation of thinness, standards of attractiveness in Western culture often favor dark, tanned skin for Caucasian women (Hillhouse, Stair, & Adler, 1996). Thus, despite the risk of skin cancer, which can cause death, women are more likely than men to tan regularly (Hillhouse, Turrissi, Holwiski, & McVeigh, 1999), and also to perceive tanned skin as important to their appearance (e.g., Leary & Jones, 1994) and their appearance as an important part of their self-worth (e.g., Harter, 1993). It follows then that mortality salience should increase these tendencies.

Supporting this, Routledge, Arndt, and Goldenberg (2004) found that women for whom tanning was highly relevant to their self-esteem, decreased their interest in protecting their skin from the sun when mortality was made salient. Moreover, people who are particularly likely to derive self-esteem from the approval of others should respond to mortality salience with especially intense

efforts to adhere to socially approved standards. Indeed, Arndt et al. (2009) found that women high in extrinsic contingency focus (i.e., self-worth is derived from extrinsic sources) responded to mortality salience with an increased interest in tanning products and services, presumably to enhance a socially accepted tanned image. Routledge et al. (2004) found, also, that mortality salience was especially likely to increase interest in tanning when tanned skin was celebrated, specifically when a flyer for a (fictitious) tanning salon was graced with an image of an attractive and very tanned woman. In a similar vein, Cox et al. (2009) found that women who read a magazine article highlighting the attractiveness of tanned skin, with accompanying pictures of celebrities, reported greater tanning intentions after mortality salience relative to a condition in which mortality was not primed. In sum, across a number of studies, mortality salience has been shown to increase interest in tanning among women who perceive tanned skin as important to their self-esteem, among women who obtain self-worth through the social approval of others, and when having tanned skin is celebrated as the social standard of attractiveness.

So women strive to attain the (e.g., tanned, thin) objectified ideal when mortality is salient. But clearly not all bodily ideals are unhealthy. Consistent with this, if appearance ideals emphasizing pale skin, for example, are made salient, mortality salience decreases tanning efforts (Cox et al., 2009, Study 2). But, many standards are unhealthy, and more generally, the tendency for mortality salience to enhance concerns about appearance above and beyond health sets women up for problems on account of the sheer amount of and stringency of expectations and standards for the female body (see Goldenberg & Arndt, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

To be clear, the effects of mortality salience, and even its effects on efforts to attain cultural

standards, are not specific to women. Both men and women respond to mortality salience with increased efforts to adhere to culturally derived standards and values (e.g., Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2004). However, the expectations and standards surrounding bodily appearance are clearly and exceedingly more stringent for women (e.g., Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In addition, when women's appearance does become the focus of attention, women suffer more consequences than do men (e.g., Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Heflick et al., 2011). We have argued that this is because of an existential threat associated with women's natural bodies – and that the objectification of women's bodies is a reaction to this inherent threat. In this vein, we have identified health risks associated with women's natural reproductive bodies as well as in the efforts women pursue to attain the body ideal.

So what can be done to guard against these risks? Are women doomed to suffer on account of their monstrosly mortal bodies? We hope not. We recently speculated about one potential solution (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2010). To the extent that the root of the problem resides within an existential threat associated with human mortality, well then, women's role in reproduction should not only provide a threat, but also a potential solution. In short, women's bodies are not only evidence of humankind's creaturely, and thus mortal, nature, but within these bodies new life is created and sustained. Recognizing the life-creating potential in women's bodies, we believe, offers a solution to the problem by confronting death with life – head on, rather than with denial.

Some studies support the effectiveness of approaching rather than denying the body's creatureliness. For example, women who are more comfortable with menstruation are also more comfortable with their own sexuality, likely making healthier sexual decisions (Rempel & Baumgartner, 2003). In a qualitative study of couples, engaging in sexual activity during menses was cited by many as a positive relationship milestone, and those

couples engaging in menstrual sex were more interested in and aroused by both romantic and more unconventional sexual activities with their partners, and were less sensitive to disgust (Allen & Goldberg, 2009). More generally, men who were more comfortable with women's 'real bodies' (defined as endorsement of scale items assessing positive attitudes toward body functions, smells, and hair) reported greater sexual assertiveness and were more often involved in committed relationships with women (Schooler & Ward, 2006). In other words, both men and women who approach women's creaturely bodies with acceptance appear at least to enjoy them more.

But ultimately, if the source of the threat – and the need to defend against it – cannot be undermined (which the long list of anthropological evidence certainly suggests), then, alternatively, efforts can be focused on altering the nature of the defenses. In this vein, research showing that women will invest more in standards for attractiveness that are conducive to health (e.g., tanning less when pale skin is depicted as attractive) is encouraging. Beyond this, it may be possible to encourage alternatives to appearance-focused defenses against female creatureliness more generally. That is, might not empowering women so that they attain symbolic value – and protection from the fear of death – from their body's health and competence work similarly to objectification? Recent research by Cooper, Goldenberg, and Arndt (2011) suggests that it might. In two studies, they found that the accessibility of death-thought (both manipulated and measured) interacted with the framing of breast self-exams. Specifically, when breast exams were framed as empowering (in contrast to highlighting their practical benefits), salient death thought led women to report greater intentions to conduct breast self-exams and, also, to feel more empowered after conducting an exam on a breast model. This work suggests that shifting the indices of women's worth may enable women to defend against concerns about mortality and human creatureliness

with efforts to bolster, rather than endanger, their health.

As it currently stands, our position makes evident that existential factors contribute to both condemnation and objectification of women's bodies. By virtue of this, fear of death can sometimes have the ironic consequence of not promoting efforts to avoid death, but engaging the very behaviors that make death, if not more likely, more imminent. Understanding the nature of the threat offers the best line of defense against such outcomes.

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# Psychological Cliterodectomy: Body Objectification as a Human Rights Violation

Shelly Grabe

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, large numbers of individuals experience violations of their human rights through various forms of bodily objectification, ranging from sexual objectification, to coerced sex work, to rape and violence – in large part simply because they are female (Bunch, 1990). Feminist scholars have suggested that the central debate on women's human rights concerns the body itself: a body that is coerced into obedience, raped as a trophy of war, mutilated and systematically violated, and disappeared from the public sphere unless it is sexualized and made available for male consumption (Agosin, 2001). Although these violations may vary in severity, they have in common the view that women's bodies are objects or property that can be controlled, sexualized, beaten, and otherwise violated. Despite the fact that scholars have suggested that across cultures sexism towards women is embodied, much that has been written has addressed women's rights violations almost solely

through non-US examples (e.g., genital cutting). Moreover, most scholarship in this area has come from a legal perspective within sociology, anthropology, or political science (Hodzic, 2011). These approaches, in part, invoke a hegemonic universalism that assumes Western women are liberated and have control over their own bodies, thereby limiting a structural analysis of how inequities between men and women contribute to objectification of and control over women's bodies everywhere (Mohanty, 1984).

This chapter will take a different approach to women's human rights by using social psychological theory to discuss the mechanisms or processes by which violations against women occur – namely through the objectification of the body. This radical departure from a legal framework and from examples that have been sensationalized throughout academia and advocacy (for example, genital cutting), has the potential to offer alternatives for intervention that extend beyond changing laws or monitoring international human rights treaties. This chapter

gets to the very heart of how violations are produced and sustained by examining the centrality of women's bodies as objects that exist for the benefit of others – thereby leading to objectification of, and control over, the female body across racial/ethnic, class, cultural, or national boundaries. The social psychological approach offered in this chapter draws on perspectives informed by feminist liberation psychology, women of color, and Third World feminisms<sup>1</sup> in an attempt to lend a new visibility to women's human rights through the perspective of psychology. The chapter confronts a major challenge to advancing social change and scholarship in the area of women's human rights by providing a comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms by which objectifying women's bodies puts women at high risk for violations of their basic rights.

The chapter is divided into three sections, which elucidate the mechanisms that contribute to and perpetuate women's human rights violations by discussing: (1) power inequities and cultural marginalization of women; (2) sexual objectification of women's bodies; and (3) internalization of the societal messages surrounding women's bodies. The first section will start by providing a social context for understanding women's human rights by explicitly discussing how women are marginalized from power and thereby lack the necessary political clout to establish full control over their bodies in male-dominated societies. It also will show that cultural explanations for body practices are often used to justify the treatment of women's bodies. The role of culture will be addressed, in part, to provide a lens from which to understand the implications of using various culturally specific examples to generalize processes surrounding women's rights. In the second section, theories of power will be used to examine how the sexual objectification of women's bodies leads to subordination and oppression. Evidence will be reviewed that suggests a sexualized body offers very little opportunity for achieving power and, instead, can serve to deprive

women of their rights. The final section of the chapter uses empirical work from within psychology to demonstrate how the objectification of women's bodies leads to internalization of these processes and ultimately the receipt of dehumanizing treatment such as violence. The literature reviewed in the final section will demonstrate that internalization of objectification puts women at high risk for violations because they come to view their *own* bodies as objects. Empirical examples are used from Western psychology, not with the intent of generalizing Western norms, but rather to highlight that across cultures women are taught to internalize their institutionalized subordination and thereby participate in the violation of their own rights; the West is no exception.

### **A SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR CONSIDERING WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS: POWER AND CULTURE**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to life, liberty, and security of person (United Nations General Assembly, 1948). Although these are considered fundamental rights protected under international law, several obstacles have prohibited their implementation when guaranteeing women's right to be free of emotional, sexual, and physical harm. First, the Declaration of Human Rights was largely a response to the World Wars and was designed (by Western nations) to protect individuals from the excesses of the State, which perhaps explains why violations against women's bodies as a result of gender discrimination are often ignored. Future generations of rights evolved that were more applicable to women and included the right to self-determination – or the right to freely determine one's political status and freely pursue economic, social, and cultural development (e.g., the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; United Nations General Assembly, 1966). However, in many cases cultural obstacles prohibit these rights from applying to the

'private' and 'individualized' nature of what many societies consider women's abuses. The introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was meant to bring to light the areas where women are denied equality with men (United Nations General Assembly, 1979). The Convention, regarded widely as the international bill of women's rights, explicitly acknowledges that extensive discrimination against women continues to exist, and that such discrimination violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity. By affirming commitment to the equal rights of men and women and stating that fundamental human rights and worth should be afforded to *all* humans, CEDAW holds an important place in bringing women into the focus of human rights concerns. Yet, a recent report produced by UN Women details sobering evidence that many violations of women continue unabated, in part because justice systems reinforce unequal power relations between men and women and are therefore biased against women's interests and well-being (United Nations, 2011).

In order to accelerate progress toward the kind of gender equality proposed in CEDAW, scholars have suggested embracing a culturally grounded and inclusive vision of rights and justice for women (Collins, Falcón, Lodhia, & Talcott, 2010; Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010). This involves the development of a critical consciousness and new vocabularies that include a discussion of power and dominance that challenges unequal power relations between men and women in order to improve strategies for women's rights. In order to more fully address how body violations against women occur, gender inequalities in power that contribute to subordination and discrimination need to be explicitly addressed.

### **Power**

Feminist authors from the Global South have articulated how patriarchy – in which society is organized such that males have a

disproportionate amount of power and control – limits and controls women's access to resources and hinders women's ability to employ laws that protect their rights or govern their bodies (Tamale, 2004). Disproportionate power therefore creates an environment that legitimizes and perpetuates women's subordinate status and adversely influences their psychological and physical health (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jenkins, 2000; Wingood & DiClemente, 2000). Critical social psychologists maintain that power differentials and inequalities are not simply a political issue, but that they are also always psychological and pivotal in attaining liberation from oppression (Griscom, 1992; Jenkins, 2000; Moane, 1999; Prilleltensky, 2008).

A quick glance at international data immediately demonstrates that almost without exception women *everywhere* in the world are, on average, disadvantaged by power differentials and are in more subordinate positions than are men (Acosta-Belén & Bose, 1990). For example, globally, women hold only 17% of seats in national parliaments (United Nations, 2010a). The percentage of women in parliaments ranges from a high of around 40% in some Nordic countries (i.e., Finland, Norway, and Sweden) to approximately 25% in some South American countries (i.e., Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador) to under 20% in countries such as the United States, France, and Israel (United Nations, 2010a). It has also been consistently demonstrated across the world that women's earnings are approximately 70% of men's earnings (United Nations, 2010a). Similar findings, which have been static since the 1970s, suggest that women perform 66% of the world's work, but earn around 10% of the income and own around 1% of the world's property (United Nations, 2010b).

Using the United States as an example, lack of women's participation in positions of power was exemplified in the media when the first Latina, and third woman ever, Sonia Sotomayor, was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States in 2009. During a news interview with white male political commentator Pat Buchanan, white female



talk-show host Rachael Maddow (2009) asked Buchanan, 'Why do you think it is that of 110 Supreme Court Justices we've had in this country, 108 of them have been white?' His response was:

Well, I think that white men were 100 percent of the people who wrote the Constitution, 100 percent of the people who wrote the Declaration of Independence, 100 percent of the people who died at Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Probably close to 100 percent of the people who died at Normandy. This has been a country built basically by white folks in this country, who were 90 percent of the nation in 1960 when I was growing up, and the other 10 percent were African Americans who had been discriminated against. That's why.

Buchanan's statement, focused on race and gender, reflects not only who has written and defended the laws that govern the United States, but also who those laws are intended to protect. That these statements were generated out of a conversation surrounding the appointment of the United States' first Latina Supreme Court judge highlights that full civic capacity is not a basic political right that women, in particular women of color, can take for granted everywhere. We live in a *world*, not a country, with laws and customs that have been largely designed, and strongly upheld, by men. Importantly, it has been suggested that violations against women are situated in relationships marked by gender inequality as reflected by exclusion, subordination, and marginalization of women within societies (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010).

Although psychologists tend to focus on individual level analyses, abstracted from multilayered, social and cultural contexts, this chapter shifts attention to the systemic or structural dimensions that determine women's subordinate status so that we may come to better understand the exploitation of women's bodies. This framework is rooted in the theoretical perspectives offered by women of color and Third World feminisms which argue that gender oppression operates not just solely through interpersonal, heterosexual relations, but also through unfavorable

social systems, such as race and class, as well as systems of global power (Crenshaw, 1989; Hurtado, 1996; Lugones, 2007; Sen & Grown, 1987).

## Culture

In support of the idea that violations against women should not be addressed on a case-by-case basis, many feminists argue that universal norms surrounding women's human rights can provide the theoretical rationale for criticizing unjust social realities and advancing women's rights (e.g., Nussbaum, 2000). Indeed, discussions of human rights often imply a universal language of rights and equality, suggesting that norms of justice can be applied across societies. However, such simple notions of universalism can raise concern.

First, a central idea behind human rights is based on Western beliefs that the locus of rights are in autonomous *individuals*, who are free of historical and social conditions (such as gender oppression; Lykes, 2001). Thus, when discussed by scholars and practitioners, 'universal' human rights are often taken to mean rights defined by the West. Holding and/or imposing standards based on Western definitions may be seen as another example of colonial domination and an imposition on people who are capable of determining their own definitions of rights and justice (Phillips, 2002). Another consequence of conflating human rights with Western values is that even when universal categories are introduced by women who live and work within the country in question, the women are commonly accused of pandering to a Western political agenda (Narayan, 1997; Nussbaum, 2000; Tripp, 2002). However, this reaction fails to recognize that women are capable of mobilizing around their own rights without Western influence and discredits numerous movements organized around gendered justice across the globe. Similarly, through much that is written about violations to women's bodies, we have come to understand human rights as an

'international' phenomenon (i.e., 'non-US' based; Powell, 2005). This is reflected in the examples widely written about to represent violations of women's rights (e.g., veiling; female genital cutting; trafficked women for involuntary prostitution). Moreover, these examples reflect how various countries or cultures are positioned in terms of having human rights monitored by international bodies such as the United Nations. Specifically, Western/Northern countries (e.g., North American), whose status as harbingers of rights is seldom questioned, are comfortably positioned to discuss human rights violations of countries from the Global South (e.g., Southeast Asian) that are often dependent on development aid and intervention coming from the West/North. Invoking women's human rights in this context creates a powerful dichotomy whereby the West evaluates the treatment of women's bodies in the rest of the world (Powell, 2005). It is inappropriate to hold the West as a harbinger or purveyor of women's rights when the United States has not passed the Equal Rights Amendment proposed in 1923, nor ratified the UN's CEDAW that was opened for signature in 1980. Moreover, the West/Rest dichotomy shields from scrutiny the cultural roots of gender inequality that get played out with women's bodies in Western countries, and thereby limits a comprehensive structural analysis of what contributes to violations against women.

In contrast to universalism, a culturally relativistic approach to understanding women's human rights argues that norms of justice are always relative to the society in which they are formed and thus values and practices regarding bodies may vary enormously from one society to another. From this perspective it is inappropriate to take the norms that emerge within one society as the standard against which to assess the norms of another (Phillips, 2002). The value of this position is that it captures the situated nature of any principles of justice. Certainly, attention to historical and cultural specificity is imperative to creating any substantive change

and without local demand for recognition of rights, no universal principles, however broad, could ever be implemented.

Although cultural relativism addresses the contextual nature of justice and treatment of women's bodies, it carries its own set of concerns. For example, cultural relativism does not take into consideration that norms of justice are often constructed under principles of gender inequity. Similarly, those who defend practices that are harmful to women, in the name of preserving 'culture', are often the same individuals who will otherwise create cultural change that serves to enhance their own political or economic interests (Phillips, 2002; Tripp, 2002). Indeed, cultural claims surrounding women's bodies are sometimes manipulated to advance other political interests, often those of male elites, and are frequently contested by the very women in whose names these claims are made. Although cultural claims may be genuine expressions of shared ways of life, claims defending violations of women's bodies that are based on culture cannot always be taken at face value. It therefore seems that when evaluating women's rights, both universal principles that fail to adequately address differences, as well as those ignoring women's rights for fear of cultural imperialism, should be suspect.

An illustrative example that demonstrates this tension is when the United States used women's rights as an important backdrop in the US invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion was, in part, justified as a means to save 'women of cover' (President Bush's terms for burka-clad Afghan women). However, less than a year after using concerns regarding cultural restrictions on women's human rights in the Muslim world to advance the 'War on Terrorism,' the United States failed to ratify the UN's CEDAW because it was a form of 'cultural colonialism' that would force American women into work and their children into day care. In a Senate Foreign Relations committee meeting to discuss US support for CEDAW, attorney Kathryn Balmforth testified that ... CEDAW, in

requiring equality for women in the workplace, will threaten US culture and values. These matters go to the core of culture, family, and religious belief and would undermine the traditional role of women as mothers who pass on cultural values (Bayefsky, Reid, & Balmforth, 2000).

Despite what might be commonly assumed about women's rights in these respective countries, Afghanistan has ratified CEDAW, whereas the United States has not. By illustrating the juxtaposition in universal and relative applications of human rights, these examples demonstrate that women can be marginalized *within* cultures and that it is important to ask 'whose culture?', when culture is being invoked in the discussion surrounding women's human rights in *any* given context or country.

The next section will use theories of power to discuss the relation between power inequalities and body objectification, and discuss the mechanisms by which objectification leads to oppression. In particular, what follows will provide the context for examining cross-cultural similarities in the sexual objectification of women and for understanding how such objectification is one of the primary processes threatening women's right to life, liberty, and security of person.

## **SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION: EMBODIED OPPRESSION**

Having a sexualized, objectified body offers few opportunities for achieving real social or political power. In *Discipline & Punish*, Foucault (1977) argues that the body is a focal point for struggles over power because it is invested with relationships that reflect domination. He argues that power, rather than residing in individuals, is institutionalized and that bodies existing within a system or institution become aware that they always have the potential to be observed. This awareness leads to self-discipline whereby individuals engage in perpetual self-surveillance in an attempt to discipline their body within a

given system. This self-surveillance is the hallmark of having internalized the body as an object.

Several well-known theorists have written about how processes of domination and objectification within inequitable systems (e.g., racism, colonization, sexism) become internalized and create debilitating psychological patterns, often referred to as 'internalized' or 'psychological oppression' (Bartky, 1990; Fanon, 1961; Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970; Moane, 1999). As critical scholars such as Du Bois (1994 [1903]) and Freire (1970) suggest, individuals in positions of subordination have access to both their own consciousness and also the consciousness of the dominator (or observer), resulting in a split, or dual consciousness. Foucault (1977) argues that the state of consciousness that results from body objectification is a sign that the tight, disciplinary control of the body has taken a hold of the mind as well. Feminist theorists have expanded on Foucault's theory by highlighting that the bodily experiences of women and men differ notably – precisely because they are differentially positioned in relation to power (e.g., Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). As such, the internalized objectification reflected in the bodies Foucault referenced (e.g., an inmate in a jailhouse; a student in a classroom) can be taken several steps further when considering gender because girls' and women's bodies may be objectified as sexual objects or property *within* each of those contexts. Feminist scholars suggest that the identification of a woman with her body and sexuality becomes oppressive when such identification becomes habitually extended into every area of her experience, resulting in a duality of consciousness that contributes to her subordinate status (Bartky, 1990). Having a fragmented or dual consciousness contributes to women's subordination because women's full capabilities are limited by the need to attend to the perspective of the dominator. However voluntary self-surveillance may appear, like economic oppression, the psychological oppression that ensues is institutionalized and systematic; it serves to make

the work of domination easier by rendering the dominated incapable of recognizing the processes responsible for their subjugation (Bartky, 1990).

In Foucault's analysis he explicitly argues that the body, based on its relative status, is caught in a system of constraints and obligations that 'deprive the individual of a *liberty* that is regarded both *as a right* and as property' (1977, p. 11). However, the extent to which these constraints are acknowledged in the West as violations against women's rights is, to date, only recognized for so-called 'international' examples. For instance, France recently banned women's head coverings by making it a punishable criminal offense for women to wear a face veil, with Italian law following in similar fashion (BBC News, 2010; *New York Times*, 2011). This example of course invokes the West/Rest dichotomy, suggesting that culturally specific body practices such as veiling violate women's rights, whereas other self-surveying bodily practices performed in the West do not.

As early as 1979 Nawal El Saadawi wrote that the exploitation and social practices that lead to oppression among Arab women were not characteristic of Middle Eastern societies, or countries of the 'Third World,' alone. Rather, such practices constitute an integral part of the political, economic, and cultural systems that are dominant in most of the world. In particular, El Saadawi highlighted that the presumed sexual 'liberation' practiced in many Western societies does not lead to the emancipation of women, but instead to an accentuated oppression whereby women are transformed into commercialized bodies and are a source of increasing capitalist profit. To make a striking comparison, El Saadawi suggested that although most women from Western societies may not be exposed to surgical removal of the clitoris (genital cutting), they are nevertheless victims of cultural and psychological cliterodectomy.<sup>2</sup>

No doubt, the physical ablation of the clitoris appears a much more savage and cruel procedure than its psychological removal. Nevertheless, the consequences can be exactly the same, since the

end result is the abolition of its functions so that its presence or absence amount to the same thing. Psychological surgery might even be more malicious and harmful because it tends to produce the illusion of being complete ... It can create the illusion of being free, whereas in actual fact freedom has been lost. (1979, p. xv)

It is particularly striking that this was written in 1979, before the surge of widely practiced Western surgeries intended to physically augment women's desirability (e.g., breast enlargement, vaginal rejuvenation and tightening; labia reduction and beautification). These examples illustrate that regardless of the cultural prescription (e.g., cut, covered, or scantily clad), women's bodies are subject to cultural requirements that are largely outside of their control, despite the fact that many girls and women perceive their choices to be freely chosen behaviors. In either case, self-disciplining the body to conform to requirements can put women's psychological and physical liberty and safety at risk.

Important in this analysis is that notions of desirability based on an objectified body are not particular to cultures where female genital cutting occurs. It has been widely documented that beauty and physical attractiveness are socially constructed and vary, sometimes dramatically, across cultures (Bordo, 1993; see also Kurtiş and Adams, Chapter 16 this volume). Moreover, women across the globe (and men for that matter) internalize cultural notions of attractiveness and desirability and strive to meet ideal standards. In the West, a dangerously thin 'ideal' has led to the proliferation of procedures dictating the proper management of the female body (Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). The bodily maintenance and alterations that accompany the management of the ideal Western body – many of which range from everyday acts of personal grooming that are highly commercialized (shaving, anti-wrinkle creams, hair gels, make-up) to the more extraordinary use of surgery – reflect bodies that have internalized cultural notions of desirability and objectification. Take, for example, Andrea

Dworkin's description of an objectified body in the West:

Standards of beauty describe in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have to her own body. They prescribe her motility, spontaneity, posture, gait, and the uses to which she can put her body. They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom. And of course, the relationship between physical freedom and psychological development, intellectual possibility, and creative potential is an umbilical one.

In our culture, not one part of a woman's body is left untouched, unaltered. No feature or extremity is spared the art, or pain, of improvement ... From head to toe, every feature of a woman's face, every section of her body, is subject to modification, alteration. This alteration is an ongoing, repetitive process. It is vital to the economy, the major substance of male-female differentiation, the most immediate physical and psychological reality of being a woman. From the age of 11 or 12 until she dies, a woman will spend a large part of her time, money, and energy on binding, plucking, painting, and deodorizing herself. (1974, pp. 113–114)

This example supports the theoretical positions taken by Foucault and Bartky, which suggest that disciplinary control over the body can get a hold of the mind as well. The disciplinary practices that Dworkin references also illustrate El Saadawi's 'psychological cliterodectomy' by demonstrating how women's bodies become politically inscribed and reflect bodies invested with relations of domination.

Yet, it is in the case of genital cutting that a woman is often assumed to be without agency; her body a metaphor for all women's subjugation. In contrast, in Western examples, women are typically granted the assumption of 'free will' and their altered bodies are seen as a metaphor for women's choice and empowerment. Moreover, in both contexts the practices are based on objectification surrounding the social constructions of women's sexuality that become internalized by women such that the social consequences for *not* complying outweigh the perceived costs of participating in one's own objectification. For example, practices across

cultures involve procedures that alter women's physical appearance and sexual desirability, enhance their femininity, and increase their social mobility (e.g., likelihood of marriage). These examples suggest that objectification of women's bodies traverses cultures and limits women's liberty.<sup>3</sup>

Identifying structural patterns of domination and objectification has long been the task of political and social theorists; however, the discipline of psychology can and should reframe standard methods to consider how the root causes of oppression lie in the structures – political and cultural – and ideologies that underlie oppressive conditions. Influenced by Sandra Bartky's work, social psychologists introduced objectification theory, a feminist social constructionist framework for investigating how girl's and women's routine experience of sexual objectification leads them to treat and experience themselves as sexual objects – that is to *self-objectify* (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996; see also Goldenberg, Roberts, Morris, & Cooper, Chapter 24 this volume). The final section of this chapter will shift toward an empirical review of investigations conducted within psychology that support the argument put forth thus far, that a self-disciplining body is a form of internalized or psychological oppression – one that threatens women's life, liberty, and security of person. Since the introduction of objectification theory, psychology has made great strides towards conducting theory-driven empirical work demonstrating the consequences of sexual objectification, largely within the United States. Therefore the examples will focus on sexual objectification as it occurs in the West – namely, when a girl's or woman's body is made into a thing for others' sexual use or when her sexual functions are treated as representative of her (Bartky, 1990). Using investigations conducted within the United States as a platform for understanding processes surrounding objectification can make a novel contribution to understanding women's rights violations in two primary ways: (1) by using examples



from Western psychology we can break out of a West/Rest approach by recognizing that the objectification of women's bodies is not unique to isolated examples such as cutting or veiling; and (2) broadening our *empirical* base of the consequences of viewing women as sexual objects has the potential to advance our understanding of processes surrounding objectification and thereby expand our understanding of how and why women's human rights violations are maintained and perpetuated.

### **OBJECTIFICATION THEORY: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM WITHIN PSYCHOLOGY**

Where does sexual objectification in the United States start? In 2002 an international clothing company, Abercrombie & Fitch, refused to stop selling thong underwear in children's sizes with 'wink wink' and 'eye candy' printed across the front (CNN Money, 2002). Despite a consumer advocacy response criticizing the sexually objectifying nature of their clothing, they later launched a t-shirt line for women with sayings such as 'Who needs brains when you have these?' and 'I had a nightmare I was a brunette' (Aschoff, 2005). Moreover, evidence reviewed by the American Psychological Association Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls (2007) suggests that examples such as these are not exceptions. Rather, they reported that girls within the United States are increasingly confronted with a sexualized culture and are encouraged to sexualize themselves at younger and younger ages. Empirical evidence from communication studies supports this trend with findings suggesting that the sexualization of women in advertisements increased significantly between 1983 and 2003 (Reichert & Carpenter, 2004). Similarly, it has been found that about one-half of advertisements in print magazines depict women as sex objects, with women in many of these images becoming increasingly 'pornified' (Paul, 2005; Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008).

This increasing trend has raised widespread response among journalists and consumer advocacy groups that the sexualization of girls is an increasing problem and is harmful to girls and women's well-being (e.g., NPR's *On Point*; Ashbrook, 2010). An abundance of scientific research has accumulated that supports this concern by demonstrating a link between sexually objectifying media and a variety of harmful body-related consequences among girls and women (see Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008 for a review).

Several influential theorists (e.g., Bartky, 1990) have contextualized the treatment of women as sexual objects as being historically rooted in male-dominated cultures and have suggested that objectification has been motivated by sociopolitical worldviews that promote and protect gender hierarchies. In order to test the hypothesis that women experience their bodies within a 'culture of objectification', Grabe, Routledge, Cook, Andersen, and Arndt (2005) assessed the extent to which the view of women as objects constitutes a widely endorsed cultural worldview. Consistent with the tenets of Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986), which suggests that people cling to or strongly endorse their cultural worldviews when death-related thoughts are accessible, the authors found that women were more likely to objectify their own *and* other women's bodies in response to death-related thoughts compared to a control condition in which their own mortality was not salient. The same was not true for men (see also Goldenberg et al., Chapter 24 this volume). These findings suggest that the objectification of women's bodies is not an idiosyncratic phenomenon, but rather an endorsed cultural worldview within the United States.

How early does this cultural worldview begin to impact girls? It has been argued that adolescents, especially girls, experience increasing amounts of sexual objectification by others as their bodies develop and that the experience of being chronically objectified leads girls to internalize an observer's

perspective of themselves. Thus, it is suggested that self-objectification is provoked by the physical changes of puberty and the social consequences that come with sexual maturation (e.g., sexual objectification; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In a study testing whether self-objectification emerges during sexual maturation, researchers examined the relationship between peer sexual harassment (a salient form of sexual objectification) and self-objectification among a sample of young adolescents (Lindberg, Grabe, & Hyde, 2007). As predicted, girls' pubertal development was linked to receipt of greater sexual objectification, self-objectification, and body shame. Girls also reported significantly higher levels of self-objectification than boys. Boys' pubertal development was not associated with self-objectification or body shame.

These trends appear to remain constant throughout adulthood. For example, diary studies support the routine occurrence of sexual objectification as a dimension of daily experiences of sexism and have found that women report more sexual objectification experiences than do men (Swim, Hyers, Cohen, & Ferguson, 2001). Because women are more often the targets of sexual objectification, it is not surprising that most research suggests that girls and women self-objectify more than boys and men (Aubrey, 2006; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998; Hebl et al., 2004; McKinley, 1998; Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004). These findings highlight that, starting in youth, girls' and boys' bodies are differently positioned in relation to power. Sexual harassment at an early age informs girls that their bodies exist within this system and further evidence suggests that the internalization of this experience continues unabated into adulthood.

There is also evidence to suggest that the process of being treated like a sexual object at this early age may lead to the development of debilitating psychological patterns or internalized oppression characteristic of domination. Using a longitudinal design,

with the early adolescent sample reported above, researchers tested the effect of self-objectification, shame, and self-hindering thought patterns on girls' depression (Grabe, Hyde, & Lindberg, 2007). The study examined the effects of self-objectification at age 11 on subsequent levels of body shame, rumination (i.e., repetitive and intrusive thoughts that focus on distress), and depression at age 13. The authors found that by age 11, girls already reported higher levels of self-objectification and body shame than did boys. By age 13, girls reported significantly more self-objectification, body shame, rumination, and depression than their male counterparts. Findings also revealed that initial levels of self-objectification (at age 11) predicted subsequent depression (at age 13) among girls, but not boys. Follow-up analyses suggested that the link between objectification and depression for girls was mediated by rumination and body shame. Specifically, higher levels of self-objectification at age 11 contributed to increased rumination and body shame at age 13, which directly predicted girls' experience with depression. Importantly, the gender difference in self-objectification *preceded* the gender differences in rumination and depression, which did not appear until age 13. These findings underscore the gendered nature of these processes and how early they begin. But perhaps more importantly, they support the theoretical assumptions that internalization of the observer's perspective comes first, and that internalized or psychological oppression follows.

In addition to studies examining the development and subsequent consequences of self-objectification among girls, a burgeoning scientific interest in objectification theory has led to a proliferation of empirical support demonstrating that self-objectification is related to a wide range of negative outcomes that threaten the life, liberty, and self-determination of adult women (for a comprehensive review see Moradi & Huang, 2008). Chief among these consequences are poor body esteem and eating-disorder symptoms (Fredrickson et al., 1998; McKinley, 1999;

McKinley & Hyde, 1996; Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Slater & Tiggemann, 2002; Tiggemann & Slater, 2001). Research also has demonstrated that self-objectification is related to depression and anxiety in college samples (Choma, Shove, Busseri, Sadava, & Hosker, 2009; Miner-Rubino, Fredrickson, & Twenge, 2002; Muehlenkamp & Saris-Baglama, 2002). There are also demonstrated links between self-objectification and risky sexual behavior and lower sexual assertiveness (Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2005), negative attitudes about menstruation (Johnston-Robledo, Sheffield, Voigt, & Wilcox-Constantine, 2007; Roberts, 2004), sexual dysfunction (Wiederman, 2000), and impaired cognitive performance (Fredrickson et al., 1998; Gapinski, Brownell, & LaFrance, 2003). It should be clear from these findings that processes surrounding the treatment of women's bodies as sexual objects severely limit women's self-determination and thereby violate principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity. This host of consequences provides empirical evidence of the psychological cliterodectomy that Nawal El Saadawi referenced in her 1979 treatise.

Although few studies have actually explored the effects of sexual and self-objectification on women's bodily integrity, a small literature is emerging that empirically examines links between women's experience of sexual objectification and invasive body modifications aimed at desirability. For example, researchers found that women's experiences of sexual objectification were significantly related to *social* motives for cosmetic surgery (e.g., deciding to have it if partner thought it was a good idea) in a sample of undergraduate women. Findings from the same study also suggested that *self*-objectification predicted *intrapersonal* motives to have cosmetic surgery (e.g., self-oriented reasons to have surgery; Calogero, Pina, Park, & Rahemtulla, 2010). These findings underscore the notion that social pressures for women require that they alter their natural appearance to conform

to cultural expectations of sexual objectification. Using such examples from the United States highlights that it is not just women from 'other' cultures that are willing to undergo extreme measures to conform to social expectations surrounding women's bodies. Women in the United States appear also at risk to internalize an objectified perspective of their bodies as a result of existing within an inequitable power system.

Recent investigations are also emerging that examine the potentially grave consequences of sexually objectifying women. Based on prior research on empathy and dehumanization, Zurbriggen (2011) hypothesized that, among male college students, sexual objectification of one's female partner might negatively impact an intimate relationship and create greater risk of sexual aggression. As predicted, she found significant negative correlations between levels of objectification and men's report of relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and beliefs that sexuality was intimacy-based. In support of the notion that objectification is a common denominator in violations surrounding the body, Zurbriggen also found that objectifying one's partner was positively related to measures of sexual aggression perpetration, rape myth acceptance, and beliefs that sexuality is power-based. That sexual objectification of an intimate partner could lead to violent attitudes and behaviors is particularly alarming given the cultural worldview that suggests that the *average* woman's body exists as an object for male viewing pleasure. Although empirical investigations are just beginning to test these relations, the findings suggest that if we view women's bodies as objects or property that exist for the benefit of others, their risk for violation exists on a continuum from being sexualized, controlled, or potentially beaten.

In sum, empirical findings from a large body of work investigating objectification theory within psychology demonstrate that viewing women's bodies as objects within the United States is not only culturally normative,

but violates girls' and women's liberty from a young age. Although mainstream Western discourse may view women's efforts toward beautification as voluntary vanity, the empirical findings in this review support El Sadaawi's claim that the consequences of physical and psychological alteration of women's sexuality may be similar. Moreover, as El Saadawi suggested, the effects of self-objectification may be even more harmful because the assumed agency creates the illusion of being free, whereas in actual fact freedom has been lost.

## CONCLUSION

Approaching the discussion of women's human rights from an empirical base within social psychology allowed us to examine the processes that get at the very core of how violations against women exist. Although there has been considerable academic discussion surrounding women's human rights elsewhere, the evidence reviewed in this chapter causes us to confront the objectification of women as a rights violation, rather than an inevitable part of being female, or at its extreme, a public health issue. The theoretical and empirical evidence reviewed demonstrated that objectification is embedded in inequitable power dynamics that begin early in youth and serve to threaten the fundamental worth and rights of women. In particular, findings from within psychology established that receipt of sexually objectifying treatment starts young, is internalized at an early age, and is accompanied by a host of consequences that reflect oppression.

Despite the demonstrated consequences of this process, the forms of objectification in mainstream US culture are limitless and exist with seemingly little attention paid to their prevalence. For example, staggering amounts of violence are unleashed against women and girls every day. Conservative estimates suggest that 22% of women in the United States are physically assaulted by an intimate partner in their lifetime, 1.3 million women are

assaulted by an intimate partner annually, 18% of women have been raped, intimate partner homicides make up 40–50% of murders of women in the United States, and in 70–80% of partner homicides the man physically abused the woman before the murder (Campbell et al., 2003; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2006). Despite the obvious gravity and illegality of these violations, there is no widespread societal objection to them or the cultural worldview that supports them. In fact, fashionable ads in mainstream publications or by designer companies (e.g., Dolce & Gabanna, Vogue) exploit that violence, marketing themes of death, dismemberment, and female submissiveness; and a steady stream of sensationalized mass media, in which men terrorize, torment, rape and murder women, is widely accepted as 'entertainment'. The socio-psychological perspective offered in this chapter challenges us to view this treatment of women's bodies through a new lens that recognizes objectification as a violation of women's human rights.

This chapter makes a contribution to progress in the area of women's human rights concerns in two novel ways. First, it was demonstrated that the sexual objectification of women's bodies involves a patriarchal system that normalizes and promotes objectification and thereby undermines women's health, cognitive capacities, and emotional, physical, and sexual well-being and may support sexual violence as a pattern of behavior. Because the objectification of women is embedded in systems of power that foster the practices that allow continual attacks on women's integrity, health, and freedom, systemic solutions that address these inequalities are imperative. Although current laws in most parts of the world have done little to dissuade the cultural worldview of women's bodies that puts them at risk to experience violations of their rights, cutting-edge law in some parts of the world suggests that it *is* possible to promote equality through legislation. For example, several Latin American countries are promoting legislation surrounding gender-based violence through feminist-informed

terms such as femicide. The term *feminicide*, as opposed to femicide, is being strategically used throughout Latin America because it highlights that extreme expressions of gender-based violence are fundamentally the result of inequitable power relations between women and men (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010). Supporters of bills criminalizing femicide in Latin American countries argue that such bills will help eliminate social silence and inaction surrounding the violation of women because the bills explicitly articulate that exploitation of social systems of power threatens women's life and liberty and is punishable by law. For example, Chapter V in the Mexican law on femicidal violence reads in Article 21:

Femicidal violence is the extreme form of gender violence against women, the result of the violation of their human rights in the public and private spheres; it is made up of the whole set of misogynistic forms of conduct – mistreatment and physical, psychological, sexual, educational, economic, property-related, family, community, institutional violence – that entail social impunity and impunity by the state, and, on placing women at risk and in a defenseless position, may culminate in homicide or attempted homicide – that is, in femicide and in other forms of violent death of girls and women, specifically death due to accidents and suicide, preventable deaths stemming from lack of security, neglect, and exclusion from development and democracy.

The second major contribution of this chapter is that it uses empirical data to call into question the hegemonic Western perspective on human rights. Despite that we have viewed rights violations surrounding women's bodies as unacceptable in other parts of the world, this review suggests we need to abolish the West/Rest dichotomy. Specifically, it is imperative that the West not cloak the treatment of women's bodies in Western countries behind individualized preferences or public health concerns, but rather acknowledge that treating girls' and women's bodies as sexual objects threatens their fundamental worth and dignity. Thus, although the evidence reviewed used Western examples to suggest that gender equity is

pivotal in attaining liberation from oppression, it should be clear that the same examples are not used to impose universalizing (i.e., Western) approaches to change (Grewal, 1999; Mohanty, 1984). Change requires addressing locally the specificities that create gender inequity. So, for example in the United States, inequality of income and wealth has not changed substantively from the 1950s and women are still heavily concentrated in a small number of low-level service and 'pink-collar' occupations. To address the normative sexual objectification of women's bodies that puts them at risk, structural changes in women's power and resources – whether they are income, occupation, political representation and so forth – need to be addressed. In addition to these crucial structural changes, change should be strategically approached from several different sectors of society. In the United States, for example, comprehensive education should include curricula for girls *and* boys aimed at identifying the myriad forms of sexual harassment and its destructive consequences. Within families, parents need to be well-versed in teaching active strategies for resisting sexism whereby girls *and* boys learn to identify mistreatment of women and critique it in accordance with women's well-being. In civil society, activism is needed in a multitude of forms to raise awareness of and protest sexualized images of women. Cultural boycotts of the sexual exploitation and violent treatment of women's bodies in entertainment should replace the cultural normativity of objectification.

In conclusion, although prior academic discussion on women's rights has contributed to producing a set of universal images of the 'Third World woman', images like the veiled woman and the genitally modified woman, this has set in motion a colonialist discourse that has made it nearly impossible to adequately uncover the mechanisms by which women's bodies come to be objectified. This chapter used research to uncover the mechanisms of objectification and violation with the intent of influencing activist efforts toward change. Of course, in order to make progress



toward the protection of women's rights there must be a diversity of feminist action, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves (Sen & Grown, 1987). Nevertheless, it seems that across the globe, to conceive of women's bodies differently is not just part of a conceptual and philosophical struggle that feminism involves, but it is related to questions of women's survival.

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## NOTES

- 1 Despite the cautioned use of the term 'Third World' (Mohanty, 1984), women writing from the perspective of the 'Third World' or Global South often position themselves as 'Third World feminists' to highlight the need for post-colonial and transnational analyses of women's lives in a manner that reclaims use of 'Third World'. As used in this chapter, the terms Global South (and North/West) are not meant as geographical references, but are used instead to reflect the socioeconomic and political divide between wealthy, 'developed' countries, known collectively as the North/West, and the poorer countries that are exploited in processes of globalization. These terms are meant to circumvent the implied inferiority that 'Third World' invokes.
- 2 The title of the chapter is borrowed from El Sadaawi's 1979 analogy.
- 3 The philosophical underpinnings surrounding questions of 'free will' or 'choice' cannot be adequately addressed here. Across cultures, regardless of the severity, girls and/or their mothers are 'choosing' disciplinary practices precisely because women's bodies are subject to cultural pressures that socialize them to be agents in the disciplinary practices surrounding their bodies. The point is not to equate all practices, but to underscore that within these practices women's bodies are engendered in an institutional ideology of patriarchy.

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# Gender Stereotype Threat among Women and Girls

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## INTRODUCTION

Can the mere existence of gender stereotypes undermine women and girls, even when women and men seem to be treated the same? Are women held back by subtle reminders of gendered expectations, despite comprising the majority of American college students? To address these questions, we examine the well-established and broad-reaching field of stereotype threat research.

Stereotype threat occurs when a situation raises concern that one will be judged in terms of group stereotypes (Steele, 2010). This can affect all kinds of people in many situations, but its impact on women's underrepresentation in mathematics and science fields is of particular importance. Stereotype threat research makes us rethink the way we frame gender gaps in these fields. Rather than blaming women's personal preferences, whether socialized or 'hard-wired,' threat suggests that responsibility may lie with environmental influences. It demonstrates how the most unsuspecting situations can impact women and girls' performance, interests, and

self-views. This focus on external rather than internal influences also paves the way for solutions, ways that we can shape environments to foster women's and girls' interests and talents. This chapter will benefit anyone who wonders why there are more men than women in science and engineering programs, anyone who wants to see more female students pursue non-traditional passions for math, computer science, military, or law enforcement careers, and anyone who questions whether existing gender divides really reflect some inevitable natural order.

Recognizing the relevance of stereotype threat to the lives of women and girls, this chapter aims to connect theory and laboratory experiments with real-world consequences. We first outline the theory, including its necessary and sufficient conditions. We then catalogue threat effects observed in women of different ages, considering how girls' social-cognitive development maps onto the development of stereotype threat. We review evidence for threat's presence in real evaluative situations and detail interventions that can reduce it. Finally, we discuss how stereotype

threat research is currently being shared and applied in educational settings.

## ORIGINS OF STEREOTYPE THREAT THEORY

Social psychologist Claude Steele was perplexed by a racial achievement gap persistent enough to reach elite halls of higher learning. Steele saw black, Latino, and Native American students being consistently outpaced by white students, even among cream-of-the-crop students who entered college with near-perfect Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores (Steele, 2010). Crucially, he also observed this pattern of underperformance among women, who tended to fall behind men in advanced mathematics classes. Noting that these groups shared in common stereotypes impugning their ability, Steele posited that merely knowing about such stereotypes was burdensome enough to harm academic performance. Steele's hunch, which would form the crux of stereotype threat theory, was soon confirmed: Steele and Aronson (1995) demonstrated that performance gaps could be closed by changing testing situations to reduce the relevance of stereotypes.

This notion was revolutionary. By focusing on stereotype awareness as a source of race and gender achievement gaps, threat research shifted the conversation away from underperforming students' low motivation or even differential treatment. It wasn't about students with low self-esteem or biased professors. It wasn't even about socialization, which presumed that students gradually came to believe and thus live down to others' negative expectations for their groups (Huguet & Régner, 2007; Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003). Perhaps most importantly, it was not about biology, some supposedly fixed deficit conferred on women by their genes, hormones, or left hemispheres (Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003). Instead, Steele was talking about an effect both external and immediate: the momentary impact of stereotype awareness.

Steele's first demonstrations ushered in a huge body of research showing again and again that mere stereotype knowledge could affect all kinds of people in all kinds of situations. Of note, Spencer, Steele, and Quinn (1999) were the first to report empirical evidence of stereotype threat effects on women. When they described a math test as producing gender differences (i.e., the threat condition), women performed substantially worse than men; when they described the test as *not* producing gender differences, there was no difference between women's and men's performance. Although a recent meta-analysis demonstrates that sex differences in math and science aptitude are dropping at rates unexplainable by biological change (Hyde & Mertz, 2009), this stereotype remains prevalent, continuing to affect women's performance and interests in the lab as well as outside of it. This chapter catalogues the conditions that engender and reduce such stereotype threat effects in the hope that disseminating this information can improve women's and girls' real-world outcomes.

## THEORY: NECESSARY AND SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS

The most well documented outcome of experiencing stereotype threat is diminished test performance. According to stereotype threat theory, when tested on a domain in which one's group is stereotyped as a poor performer (e.g., women testing in math or spatial ability), one becomes concerned about a possibly poor performance seeming stereotype-confirming in one's own eyes or in the eyes of others. Paradoxically, test performance is thus diminished, perhaps as concerns about stereotypes disturb one's concentration on the test or increase the test taker's anxiety (see the 'Moderators and Mediators' section of this chapter for a full discussion of possible explanations of *how* stereotype threat causes diminished performance). When the threat of appearing stereotype-confirming is removed from the situation, members of stereotyped



groups score as well as non-stereotyped group members (e.g., women match men's math test scores).

Although more than 15 years' worth of research on stereotype threat has been published, some remaining misconceptions should be addressed up front. Perhaps chiefly, stereotype threat can be mistakenly perceived as stereotype internalization, or believing that stereotypes about one's group are true. In fact, research shows that one does not have to endorse a given stereotype in order to be affected by stereotype threat (Huguet & Régner, 2009; Wheeler & Petty, 2001); one need only be aware that others may endorse it. Although personal stereotype endorsement can exacerbate the threat experience (Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007; Schmader, Johns, & Barquissau, 2004; Shapiro, 2011), it is not a core requirement.

Also largely inaccurate is the idea that threat makes people give up in the face of a challenge. To the contrary, individuals who suffer from threat are not inherently weak-willed, nor made so by situational reminders of negative stereotypes. Threatened individuals may indeed shy away from stereotype-relevant evaluative tasks (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005) or expect to perform more poorly on them (Brodish & Devine, 2009; Kray, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001; Stangor, Carr, & Kiang, 1998). Further, repeated threat experiences may decrease interest in or identification with the stereotyped domain (Steele, 1997); but in the moment, poor performance under threat is not for lack of trying (Huguet & Régner, 2007; Jamieson & Harkins, 2007, 2009; Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003).

That covers what stereotype threat is *not*; so what is stereotype threat? Researchers generally agree that a stereotype threat experience has three fundamental characteristics: one must be a member of a *stereotyped group* in a situation where the *stereotype is salient* while engaging in a task that can be *evaluated*. These conditions appear with some frequency for many women and girls learning and working in traditionally masculine fields,

increasing their likelihood of experiencing threat.

The most basic criterion for experiencing stereotype threat is simply being a member of a stereotyped group. Further, that group identity must be currently salient, whether because of chronically strong identification (e.g., Schmader, 2002) or because something in the environment makes that identity stand out (e.g., being the only member of one's group; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002).

Since all social groups can be targeted by a stereotype, theoretically anyone can experience stereotype threat. Indeed, stereotype threat effects have been demonstrated in a wide variety of groups, ranging from people of low socioeconomic status (e.g., Croizet & Claire, 1998) to white men (e.g., Stone, Lynch, Sjomeling, & Darley, 1999).<sup>1</sup> However, much stereotype threat research focuses on low status groups because they are targeted by more numerous and negative stereotypes, and thus face particularly grim consequences. Stereotypes reinforce lower social status for non-dominant groups, such as women and racial and sexual minorities, in order to maintain the status quo (Berger, Rosenholtz, & Zelditch, 1980; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994). For example, low-status groups are systematically stereotyped as less competent (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) but more communal (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996) than high-status groups. This justifies the subordination of low-status groups as well as the economic and political power enjoyed by high-status groups. Furthermore, stereotypes of low status groups may be more persistent; Sekaquaptewa and Espinoza (2004) found that violations of stereotypes by low-status groups (but not high-status groups) lead to biased processing that maintains that stereotype.

The second primary criterion for the experience of stereotype threat is that the stereotype must be salient. This can happen in a variety of ways. In some studies, participants are verbally reminded of the stereotype prior to a test of their performance in that domain (e.g., Spencer et al., 1999). Of course, explicit

reminders should not be necessary, as threat occurs in everyday testing situations in which stereotypic group differences are well known (Steele, 2010). Thus, merely highlighting that a task measures a stereotyped skill (e.g., by explicitly labeling tasks ‘math tests’ or ‘intelligence tests’ or by emphasizing their diagnosticity) is enough to make stereotypes salient (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Stereotype salience can also be manipulated to reduce the experience of threat, as when experimenters call spatial ability tests ‘puzzles’ or inform participants that a given math test reveals no gender differences. However, real-world evaluative tasks need little finessing to seem stereotype-relevant and thus may be harder to reframe in order to reduce threat: most students know very well what placement exams are meant to measure.

The boundaries between the criteria of identity and stereotype salience are often blurry, as stereotypes can also be made salient by emphasizing a stereotyped identity (e.g., Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999). A striking example comes from Danaher and Crandall (2008), who reported that asking students for their demographic information, including gender, before an AP (Advanced Placement) test significantly reduced their performance compared to collecting demographic information after the test. Subtler still, Ambady and colleagues (Ambady, Paik, Steele, Owen-Smith, & Mitchell, 2004) induced stereotype threat among women taking a math test by subliminally priming women’s gender identity.

The final primary criterion for the experience of stereotype threat is the opportunity for evaluation of performance in the stereotyped domain, thus creating the opportunity to confirm or disconfirm the stereotype. Jamieson and Harkins (2010) found that women only underperformed on a math test when the gender stereotype was made salient *and* they were told that scores on the test would be compared between genders; stereotype threat effects were eliminated when women were told that test scores would be averaged across gender, even when the stereotype remained salient.

Often evaluation takes place in contexts where the individual is concerned about confirming the stereotype in the eyes of other people (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2007). However, stereotype threat effects have been shown even when performance is totally private (e.g., Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2003; Shapiro, 2011; Wout, Jackson, Danso, & Spencer, 2008), demonstrating that it is the possibility of evaluation in the stereotyped domain, irrespective of audience, that is necessary for stereotype threat to occur. Some have even posited the existence of multiple types of threat: self-threat may be elicited by worries over private confirmation, whereas group-threat may arise from worries over public confirmation (e.g., Shapiro, 2011; Wout et al., 2008).

Akin to evaluation is task difficulty: there is some evidence that the performance task must be difficult in order to elicit stereotype threat effects, suggesting that threat may become more likely as students progress through school (O’Brien & Crandall, 2003; Neuville & Croizet, 2007; Spencer et al., 1999; Walton & Spencer, 2009). The reasoning is that an easy test does not really provide the opportunity for evaluation because presumably everyone will do well, whereas distinctions (and thus stereotype confirmation) can be determined with a more difficult test. However, evidence that test difficulty is a necessary requirement for threat has not been wholly consistent (e.g., Stricker & Bejar, 2004).

Women and girls are particularly likely to encounter stereotype-threatening evaluative situations because gender and its attendant stereotypes are so frequently highlighted in our culture. Gender is pointed out frequently through linguistic labels (referring to people as ‘men’ or ‘women’, ‘guys’ or ‘girls’), gendered appearance norms, and segregation both subtle (tendencies for adults to have same-sex friends) and explicit (girls’ and boys’ lines in classrooms; Bigler & Liben, 2007). Further, gender’s central role as a social category (Gurin & Markus, 1989) fosters the dissemination of gender stereotypes,

such as those conveyed through advertising (Media Education Foundation, 2010). Even children quickly learn that gender matters and that they ought to pay attention to it, which encourages stereotyping from a young age (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Furthermore, women with multiple negatively stereotyped identities may face additional threats, whether because of additive stereotypes (e.g., mathematical intelligence stereotypes for Latina women; Gonzales, Blanton, & Williams, 2002) or stereotypes unique to certain groups (e.g., sexual stereotypes specific to African American women).

### **GENDER STEREOTYPE THREAT OUTCOMES AMONG WOMEN**

Given these criteria, stereotype threat has the potential to affect women's performance in any domain in which they are negatively stereotyped. For example, women are vulnerable to stereotype threat effects in financial decision-making (Carr & Steele, 2010), problem-solving (Carr & Steele, 2009), managerial tasks (Bergeron, Block, & Echtenkamp, 2006), a novel visuospatial task (Campbell & Collaer, 2009), driving (Yeung & von Hippel, 2008), leadership (Davies et al., 2005), and political knowledge (McGlone, Aronson, & Kobrynowicz, 2006). However, in keeping with the theory's origins (Steele, 2010; Steele & Aronson, 1995) and befitting its serious consequences for academic and career-related domains, most gender stereotype threat research has focused on test performance in mathematics and science.

As previously mentioned, Spencer, Steele, and Quinn (1999) were the first to find that women underperformed on a math test when it was described as typically producing gender differences, but equaled men when told that the test did *not* produce gender differences. Stereotype threat effects among women taking math tests have since been replicated numerous times (e.g., Aronson & Steele, 2005; Davies, Spencer, Quinn, & Gerhardstein, 2002; Good, Aronson, & Harder, 2008; Martens,

Johns, Greenberg, & Schimel, 2006; Walsh, Hickey, & Duffy, 1999).

In addition to direct effects on test-taking, stereotype threat has other consequences that could ultimately undermine girls' and women's academic outcomes. For example, women under threat are more likely to avoid stereotyped domains, as when they choose verbal over math test items (Davies et al., 2002) and show less interest in stereotype-relevant tasks (Smith, Sansone, & White, 2007) and math-related careers (Davies et al., 2002). Women under threat have difficulty producing new math problem-solving strategies (Quinn & Spencer, 2001), and stereotype threat also inhibits women from learning (Rydell, Rydell, & Boucher, 2010; Rydell, Shiffrin, Boucher, Van Loo, & Rydell, 2010; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002). The latter finding is particularly troubling because interventions aimed at promoting threat-free recall will be of little help to women prevented from learning in the first place.

Women under threat may experience a number of additional psychological consequences relevant to academic performance and identities, including increased anxiety (Ben-Zeev, Fein, & Inzlicht, 2005), internal attributions for their failure (Koch, Muller, & Sieverding, 2008), self-stereotyping (Gustafsson & Bjorklund, 2008), and rejection of feminine traits seen as incompatible with math success (Pronin, Steele, & Ross, 2004). Furthermore, Inzlicht, McKay and Aronson (2006) argue that effort devoted to dealing with threat depletes cognitive resources that could otherwise be devoted not only to the current math task but also to self-control in general. As a result, women may show 'threat spillover effects' beyond threatening evaluative environments, by acting more aggressively and eating less healthy foods (Inzlicht & Kang, 2010).

### **GENDER STEREOTYPE THREAT OUTCOMES AMONG GIRLS**

The stereotype threat research emphasis on college students' outcomes may underestimate

the prevalence of this phenomenon. The capacity to experience threat has been documented among high school (Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003), middle school (Good, Aronson, & Inzlicht, 2003; Huguet & Régner, 2007), and even elementary school girls (Ambady, Shih, Kim, & Pittinsky, 2001). Its effects on academic outcomes make stereotype threat uniquely relevant to educators. Thus, teachers should understand when and how these effects manifest for girls of different ages.

Much evidence demonstrates that stereotype threat effects can occur well before students enter college. Keller and Dauenheimer (2003) showed that high school girls performed less well than boys (average age 15.7 years) on a math test that was described as stereotype-relevant but matched boys when the test was described as gender-fair. Huguet and Régner (2007) demonstrated that 11- to 13-year-old girls recalled fewer details of a complex figure when they thought it was a test of geometry rather than memory or drawing, or when they performed alongside boys rather than other girls.

Evidence for stereotype-induced underperformance before middle school is somewhat more spotty. Muzzatti and Agnoli (2007) found stereotype threat effects in samples of fifth- and eighth-graders but not second-, third-, or fourth-graders. The authors argued that stereotype threat becomes more likely as girls gain awareness of gender stereotypes about math. Ambady and colleagues (2001) similarly found that subtly reminding sixth through eighth grade Asian American girls of their gender, lowered their standardized math test scores. In contrast to Muzzatti and Agnoli's findings, however, girls in kindergarten, first, and second grade also performed less well after their gender was made salient (by coloring pictures of stereotypically female targets). Further, third- through fifth-grade girls actually did better after their female identities were highlighted. Importantly, the age groups harmed by threat were more likely to associate boys with greater math skills, whereas third- through fifth-grade girls

tended to associate girls with math (Ambady et al., 2001). Future research may test stereotype awareness or endorsement as a mediating variable to better understand how threat may affect young children.

### ***Developmental Insights***

Although some evidence suggests that young girls may experience stereotype threat, this population is far less studied than college women. Reflecting on the necessary conditions for stereotype threat (stereotyped group membership, stereotype salience, potential for evaluation) alongside children's social-cognitive development may shed light on when stereotype threat effects can occur for young girls.

With respect to the first criterion of group membership, children become aware of their gender very early. Infants can tell women from men as early as age six to nine months, and toddlers can verbally and nonverbally distinguish between genders by 18–24 months (Halim & Ruble, 2010). Further, children can identify themselves as girls or boys by 27 months or earlier (Halim & Ruble, 2010). Thus, girls as young as two years may arguably meet the criterion of stereotyped group membership. The development of a more multi-faceted connection between self and gender, or gender identity, however, continues on until age six or seven, as children grasp the concepts of gender stability (i.e., boys grow up into men and girls into women, not vice versa) and gender consistency (i.e., a girl has a 'girl essence' that does not go away even when she dresses like a boy; Halim & Ruble, 2010). Good and Aronson (2008) argue that children require a relatively sophisticated understanding of their gender identities before they can be said to experience stereotype threat, but the precise level of gender identification needed for stereotype threat to occur has yet to be demonstrated empirically.

Stereotype threat also depends on stereotype awareness, salience, and relevance; as it turns out, children learn to stereotype quickly.

Relying on social category cues to organize their social world (Bigler & Liben, 2007), children are particularly likely to rigidly expect specific traits or behaviors from so-called ‘natural’ categories such as gender and race (i.e., to engage in essentialist thinking; Bigler & Liben, 2007). Gender is particularly easy to stereotype, as gender is marked more frequently and with less taboo than other identities such as race (Ambady et al., 2001; Arthur, Bigler, Liben, Gelman, & Ruble, 2008; Bigler & Liben, 2007), and children directly learn gender stereotypes from their parents (e.g., feedback about gendered play) and the media (e.g., female characters portrayed as less active than male; Halim & Ruble, 2010). As a result, infants aged 18–26 months can match gender-typed toys, objects, and appearance features to boys’ and girls’ faces. By age five, children know that girls are gentle and boys are adventurous, among other traits. Importantly, when asked to draw students who are good at math, girls as young as six more often draw boys than girls, indicating early awareness of the math-gender stereotype (Beilock, Gunderson, Ramirez, & Levine, 2010). The criteria of stereotype salience and awareness, at least for the domain of math, may be fulfilled by the first grade or earlier.

Finally, to experience stereotype threat, one’s performance must have the potential to confirm a stereotype, whether privately or publicly. However, research has shed little light on either type of concern among children. For instance, little is known about children’s meta-perceptions of their gender. That is, research on children’s gender identities tends to focus on private regard (how I feel about being a boy or a girl) while ignoring public regard (how I think other people feel about boys and girls; Halim & Ruble, 2010). Moreover, we know more about how children feel about their race than about their gender (Halim & Ruble, 2010). To understand when threat emerges among children, research must examine children’s stereotype-confirmation concerns and awareness of others’ stereotypic judgments.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MATHEMATICS (STEM) FIELDS**

Understanding and reducing stereotype threat is important because it impedes women’s entry into male-dominated fields. Although many researchers focus on math stereotypes and outcomes, women’s supposed ineptitude (and attendant threat effects) extends across STEM fields, targeting science (Nosek et al., 1999), engineering (Logel, Walton et al., 2009), and computer skills (Koch et al., 2008). Indeed, women remain outnumbered by men across STEM majors, graduate programs, faculty rosters, and non-academic jobs, particularly in the hard sciences, computer science, and engineering (AAUW, 2010; National Science Foundation, 2007). Women earn 38.4% of bachelor’s degrees awarded in these fields and hold just 24.2% of jobs (National Science Foundation, 2007).

Even more troubling, situational threat experiences present a particularly strong barrier to those women who are most interested and invested in STEM. Math-identified women are especially vulnerable to threat (Spencer et al., 1999), women in advanced college math courses report feeling threat (e.g., Good et al., 2008), and academically motivated women respond to threat conditions with increased performance-avoidance goals (Smith et al., 2007). In other words, accumulated threat experiences harm the ‘vanguard’ of the population (Steele, 1997; Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002), thus robbing the field of the very women who might shatter stereotypes by persisting in STEM. Given the performance deficits, anxiety, and self-doubt engendered by threat, it is hardly surprising that women might want to avoid these experiences by leaving (or failing to enter) STEM fields.

Note that this loss of female talent actually perpetuates stereotypes and thus stereotype threat. Because women leave fields where they are vulnerable to stereotype threat, women



continue to be underrepresented in these fields. This further damages female students' experiences in STEM fields, perpetuating a lack of female role models in male-dominated fields (a known buffer against threat effects; Marx & Roman, 2002) and contributing to a potentially unwelcoming or even hostile environment for new entrants. Further, because threat operates largely below public awareness, its role in the STEM gender gap remains hidden and underrepresentation is instead attributed to women's intrinsic lack of interest or talent. Thus, stereotype threat experiences produce a cyclical process, both promoting the stereotype that women are not capable of success (leading women to avoid STEM) and contributing to the continuation of threat experiences (as lack of women in STEM promotes the stereotype).

## MODERATORS AND MEDIATORS

Once stereotype threat had been demonstrated, researchers turned their attention to how, why, and for whom stereotype threat influences outcomes. This research has identified several factors that may exacerbate threat effects (i.e., moderating factors). Many can be interpreted as heightening one of the basic three criteria for stereotype threat effects. For example, women who are highly identified with their gender show increased vulnerability to stereotype threat (Schmader, 2002; Wout et al., 2008), as do women who find themselves to be the only woman in a group of men (Huguet & Régner, 2007; Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002), presumably because their stereotyped group identity becomes more salient. Relatedly, women who individuate themselves (i.e., emphasize their individuality rather than their group membership) prior to taking a math test did not show the negative effects of stereotype threat (Ambady et al., 2004), perhaps because their gender identity became *less* salient.

Other moderators of the stereotype threat effect seem to enhance the salience or relevance of the stereotype. For example, women

who are invested in the stereotyped domain (e.g., being highly motivated to pursue math) are more vulnerable to stereotype threat (Aronson et al., 1999; Spencer et al., 1999; Stone et al., 1999). Women who endorse gender stereotypes, both implicitly (Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007; Nosek et al., 2009; Ramsey & Sekaquaptewa, 2011) and explicitly (Schmader et al., 2004) are more vulnerable to stereotype threat effects as well, perhaps because the stereotype remains chronically salient for these women. Similarly, women who are high in stigma consciousness (i.e., the chronic self-awareness that one is a member of a stigmatized group) show larger performance decrements under threat than women who are low in stigma consciousness (Brown & Pinel, 2003). Interacting with others who endorse the stereotype may also increase its salience, as women showed increased stereotype threat effects after they interacted with sexist people (Logel, Walton et al., 2009).

Although person-level factors play a role (whether critical, such as stereotyped group membership, or intensifying, such as stigma consciousness), threat is a primarily situational phenomenon (Steele, 1997). Even women who care about math, value being female, and are chronically aware that they are the targets of stereotypes can do well in math provided that they perform in a non-threatening environment. Threat is fundamentally driven by something in the moment – rather than something in the person – that induces a focus on one's stereotyped identity and one's potential to confirm it (Good & Aronson, 2008), whether to oneself or to others (Shapiro, 2011).

Other moderators of stereotype threat do not fit cleanly into the three primary criteria: stereotype threat is more likely among women who are low self-monitors (Inzlicht, Aronson, Good, & McKay, 2006), have an internal locus of control (Cadinu, Maass, Lombardo, & Frigerio, 2006), lack a coping sense of humor (Ford, Ferguson, Brooks, & Hagadone, 2004), or have low working memory capacity (Régner et al., 2010). These criteria may instead speak to the processes underlying threat.

Over the past decade, researchers have focused on uncovering the mediating processes by which outcomes for members of stereotyped groups are affected under stereotype threat. This question is important because understanding *why* and *how* stereotype threat occurs reveals the cognitive or affective processes that must be targeted to protect women from threat. Researchers have proposed a variety of different mediators, including cognitive processes, physiological responses, emotional reactions, and changes in motivation.

Perhaps the strongest evidence points to distraction or cognitive resource depletion as a key mechanism underlying stereotype threat. Schmader and colleagues (Schmader & Johns, 2003; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008) found that stereotype threat leads to decreased working memory, which directs attention and delegates resources for cognitive tasks (see also Beilock, Rydell, & McConnell, 2007). Specifically, threat has been shown to reduce women's ability to complete a taxing cognitive assignment (identifying math equations as true or false while remembering a list of words), and such reductions in working memory can mediate the effect of threat on math performance (Schmader & Johns, 2003). Similarly, Carr and Steele (2009) found that the suppression of stereotypes, another cognitively taxing task that may rely on working memory, mediated the relationship between stereotype threat and the pursuit of unsuccessful strategies while taking a math test, which contributes to lower performance (see also Logel, Iserman, Davies, Quinn, & Spencer, 2009). Smith and White (2002) also found that stereotype-threatened participants spent more time thinking about things extraneous to the test and less time thinking about actual test items.

The logic that women under stereotype threat are distracted or have their resources depleted in some way could be applied to a host of other mediators studied. For example, Keller and Dauenheimer (2003) found that women felt more dejected while taking a math test under stereotype threat, and they theorized

that those feelings of dejection could be distracting while taking the test. Women under threat may also be distracted by negative thinking (Cadinu, Maass, Rosabianca, & Kiesner, 2005).

Other research focuses on physiology rather than cognition. Under stereotype threat, women experience increased physiological arousal that could lead to their lowered performance. Ben-Zeev and colleagues (2005) have theorized that this is a primary mechanism of stereotype threat. Arousal has been shown to have negative effects on performance for difficult tasks but positive effects on performance for easy tasks (e.g., Zajonc, 1965), which maps precisely onto stereotype threat findings (Ben-Zeev et al., 2005; O'Brien & Crandall, 2003). Furthermore, researchers have found empirical evidence that women under threat show evidence of physiological arousal through skin conductance, skin temperature, blood pressure measures (Osborne, 2007), and changes in heart rate (Croizet et al., 2004). Murphy, Steele, and Gross (2007) found that women have a physiological response (as measured through heart rate, skin conductance, and sympathetic activation of the cardiovascular system) to merely watching a video that portrays a math, science, and engineering conference with noticeably more male than female participants. Thus, physiological arousal appears to be an important mediator of stereotype threat effects.

The physiological arousal that accompanies stereotype threat could be evidence of anxiety produced when one becomes aware of being the target of a stereotype in a currently relevant domain. Indeed, several researchers have documented heightened anxiety while under threat (Brodish & Devine, 2009; Hoyt, Johnson, Murphy, & Skinnell, 2010; Osborne, 2001; Spencer et al., 1999). In a study by Hoyt and colleagues (2010), women under threat regarding their leadership abilities who were the only woman in a group of men reported increased feelings of anxiety and were rated as more anxious by independent observers (see Bosson, Haymovitz, & Pinel, 2004, for

evidence of observed rather than self-reported anxiety's role in threat). Furthermore, some researchers have concluded that anxiety at least partially mediates the effect of stereotype threat on performance (Brodish & Devine, 2009; Osborne, 2001; Spencer et al., 1999).

Although anxiety may be common in threat, most researchers doubt that it is the only process driving its effects. Rather, attempts to control expressions of this anxiety may actually underlie stereotype threat processes, as evidenced by reaction time data (Johns, Inzlicht, & Schmader, 2008) as well as neural imaging studies (Krendl, Richeson, Kelley, & Heatherton, 2008; Wraga, Helt, Jacobs, & Sullivan, 2007). Suppression of anxiety depletes executive resources, leading to lowered performance in the task at hand. This interpretation of the role of anxiety supports the popular cognitive resource depletion account of stereotype threat. Croizet and colleagues (2004) even theorized that observed changes in heart rate variability under threat could signal a disruptive mental load.

A final class of mediators relate to women's motivations under threat. Stereotype threat is said to be, at its core, a threat to the self: the possibility of giving a poor performance in a domain that you care about (i.e., that you personally identify with) is particularly threatening to the self-concept compared to performance in a less personally critical domain (Schmader, 2002). Therefore, when people enter threat-relevant settings (for example, women entering a math classroom), they appraise the situation and assess their capacity to overcome the threat. When people believe that they do not have the psychological resources or ability to succeed in the threatening situation, their motivation to perform well may wane. This can be seen in Keller's (2002) finding that women self-handicap (i.e., make a task more difficult so as to provide a ready-made excuse for poor performance) while under threat (see also Sekaquaptewa, Waldman, & Thompson, 2007). Self-handicapping seems to be qualitatively different from arousal, anxiety, or cognitive distraction mediators, since it is

tied to a motivation to preserve a positive view of the self.

Relatedly, Cadinu and colleagues (Cadinu, Maass, Frigerio, Impagliazzo, & Latinotti, 2003) found that expectations of performance mediated the relationship between stereotype threat and performance; these expectations may be closely related to various motivational strategies. Women under threat are less likely to adopt a promotion focus (i.e., eagerness toward the task; Seibt & Forster, 2004) as compared to a prevention focus (i.e., heightened vigilance against failure), which can lower performance. Similarly, women under threat are more likely to adopt performance-avoidance goals (Brodish & Devine, 2009). This pattern may be especially likely for women who are achievement-motivated; Smith and colleagues (2007) found that these women were more likely to adopt performance-avoidance goals, which led to lowered absorption and interest in the task.

Of course, it is unlikely that a single mechanism can explain stereotype threat; rather, it is likely to be a complicated process involving a host of mediators. It is worth noting that several theorists have attempted to develop models that involve more than one mediator (e.g., Ben-Zeev et al., 2005; Brodish & Devine, 2009; Chung, Ehrhart, Ehrhart, Hattrup, & Solamon, 2010; Shapiro, 2011). Understanding the process of stereotype threat can help researchers develop interventions that disrupt that process, thereby reducing the harmful effects of stereotype threat.

## WAYS TO REDUCE OR PREVENT STEREOTYPE THREAT

Researchers examine when and how stereotype threat occurs so that they can uncover ways to prevent it. To that end, stereotype threat intervention research has been built upon what we know about its essential criteria, moderators, and mediators. For instance, identity-based interventions alter the criteria of stereotyped group membership and stereotype salience to reduce threat. Role model

interventions reduce the salience or relevance of stereotypes by directly countering them. Interventions that focus on women's attributions of either anxiety or achievement address physiological and motivational mediators. Finally, self-affirmation interventions address the criterion of performance evaluation, which may threaten self-esteem, and tap into motivational mechanisms driving threat.

### ***Identity-Based Interventions***

Strong identification with a stereotype-relevant identity can make people more vulnerable to threat (e.g., Schmader, 2002). However, individuals often have several important social identities. Some interventions thus emphasize people's non-stigmatized identities (e.g., elite college students) over their stigmatized identities (e.g., women; McGlone & Aronson, 2007; Rydell & Boucher, 2010). Similarly, Shih and colleagues (1999) found that emphasizing Asian American women's ethnic identity enhanced performance on a math test, whereas emphasizing gender identity diminished performance; these results were attributed to the positive expectations that Asian Americans are good at math (known as 'stereotype lift'; Walton & Cohen, 2003). These findings imply that the particular intersection of one's identities determines what kind of identity-based interventions may be effective.

Other identity-related threat reduction strategies blur boundaries between groups, which may weaken the salience of one's stereotyped group identity or reduce expectations that one's performance will be judged stereotypically (Rosenthal & Crisp, 2006). According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), people categorize themselves and others into 'ingroups' (those to which we belong), and 'outgroups' (those to which we do not belong). Drawing the lines between 'us' and 'them' sets off a process of ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation, giving rise to prejudice and stereotyping. Threat interventions that blur the lines between ingroups and outgroups make

threat less likely by de-emphasizing the stereotyped ingroup and weakening the perception that one will be stereotyped by an outgroup. In one study, women under threat who reflected on ways that men and women are similar showed fewer negative outcomes than women who thought about how men and women differ, particularly when they generated academic similarities (Rosenthal, Crisp, & Suen, 2007). Thinking about intergroup similarities may have de-emphasized distinctions between the groups, which is known to reduce intergroup stereotyping (Hall, Crisp, & Suen, 2009).

The idea that interventions that reduce intergroup stereotyping might also reduce concerns about being stereotyped inspired an intervention based on the common ingroup identity model (Mowbray & Sekaquaptewa, 2011). Emphasizing a common identity shared by members of different groups can improve intergroup relations (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Membership in a shared superordinate group reduces outgroup bias and increases favoritism toward the inclusive ingroup. Extending this logic to stereotype threat, the formation of a common ingroup may make stereotyped targets feel that their stigmatized identity is less salient or that others may be less likely to evaluate their performance according to stereotypes. Indeed, Mowbray and Sekaquaptewa (2011) showed that female science majors who believed they shared a common 'cognitive style' with mostly male attendees at a science conference (i.e., a common ingroup identity) reported fewer stereotype threat concerns relative to women who lacked this common ingroup identity. Seeing one's gender underrepresented in a science context can induce stereotype threat for women (Murphy et al., 2007), and making them believe they shared something in common with the people in that context, prevented this. As when group boundaries are blurred, concern about stereotyping can be reduced when people think of a former outgroup as a new ingroup by virtue of a shared social identity.

### **Role Model Interventions**

Stereotype threat occurs when stereotypes are salient and seem relevant to the task at hand. Role models who counter that stereotype may make it seem less relevant, thus buffering women from threat. Unfortunately for women and girls entering STEM fields of study, less than 10% of faculty in US mathematics and engineering departments are women (National Science Foundation, 2007). Female students are thus less likely to have same gender mentors than male students, a cause for concern considering the demonstrated benefits of having an ingroup mentor or role model (Lockwood, 2006; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Intervention researchers have highlighted the need for role models by demonstrating how exposure to successful women in STEM buffers threat among women and girls (e.g., McIntyre, Paulson, & Lord, 2003). To illustrate, Marx and Roman (2002) demonstrated that college women who learned that their female experimenter was successful in math performed better on a math test than women whose experimenter was a math-competent man or a woman said not to be skilled in math.

Role models may be effective not only because they make stereotypes seem less relevant, but also because they can weaken stereotypes. In particular, external forces such as role models may be especially adept at reshaping nonconscious or *implicit stereotypes* as opposed to explicit stereotypes (Stout, Dasgupta, Hunsinger, & McManus, 2011). Whereas explicit stereotypes are dictated by conscious efforts to appear egalitarian or – for women already in STEM – defend one's identity, implicit stereotypes are theorized to stem from repeated pairings in our social environments (Karpinski & Hilton, 2001). For example, men are more often seen in prominent STEM roles than women, and stereotypic messages maligning women's skills are prevalent. This explains why even women in STEM fields report implicit male–STEM associations (Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002).

On a more positive note, it also suggests that female–STEM associations can be strengthened by changing environmental pairings (as Blair, Ma, and Lenton, 2001, demonstrated with 'female–strong' associations). Female role models in STEM are one way to promote such counterstereotypic pairings. In support of this possibility, Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) showed that female college students exposed to female leaders (in the form of a 'famous women' quiz) showed weaker implicit men–leadership associations (see also Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001). To the extent that lowering implicit stereotypes reduces women's vulnerability to stereotype threat (Kiefer & Sekaquaptewa, 2007; Nosek et al., 2009; Ramsey & Sekaquaptewa, 2011), exposing women to successful counterstereotypic female role models is a promising stereotype-threat intervention strategy.

In a preliminary demonstration that environments featuring role models can reduce implicit stereotyping and stereotype threat, Ramsey and colleagues (Ramsey, Betz, & Sekaquaptewa, in Press) tested an intervention meant to mimic a supportive academic environment for female STEM undergraduates. Female STEM students in the intervention condition took a quiz about famous women in STEM and were exposed to incidental environmental messages supporting women in STEM (i.e., a flyer announcing a predominantly female math faculty panel and a pencil listing encouraging statistics about female science majors). Compared to a control condition (students who were quizzed on flowers and saw flyers and pencils without STEM references), intervention students showed significantly reduced stereotype threat concerns and increased implicit identification with math. This study provided initial support for the idea that exposure to environmental messages promoting women's success in STEM can reduce women's concerns about confirming stereotypes, and thus potentially enhance their STEM outcomes.



### **Anxiety Attribution Interventions**

Because threat leads to performance-dampening physiological outcomes such as stress and anxiety (e.g., Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele, 2001), it is possible to reduce the negative outcomes of threat by changing the way that anxiety is attributed. Interventions thus seek to help students explain their stress in a way that is not based on concern about performance. An early demonstration of this misattribution principle (Stone et al., 1999) showed that attributions for performance-related anxiety could be redirected by pointing out the possible influence of external variables, such as the lighting and temperature of the room. Reframing the threat experience as a challenge also reduces threat effects, as stress and anxiety can be relabeled in positive terms, such as eagerness (Alter, Aronson, Darley, Rodriguez, & Ruble, 2010).

One of the most exciting interventions in recent years underscores the importance of sharing stereotype threat research with educators, policy-makers, and those vulnerable to stereotype threat. As in other threat studies, college women and men completed a math test described either as stereotype-relevant or -irrelevant. But when women under threat were first taught about stereotype threat research and encouraged to attribute any anxiety during the test to a common concern about stereotypes, rather than their personal ineptitude, they performed just as well as men and as women in the stereotype-irrelevant condition (Johns, Schmader, & Martens, 2005).

### **Achievement Attribution Interventions**

From a motivational perspective, threat may be detrimental when students feel that they lack the ability to perform well. There is a long history of research showing that academic outcomes suffer when external attributions are made for one's success and internal attributions are made for failure. This pattern

implies that failure is due to lack of ability and thus stable, enduring, and likely to reoccur. In contrast, internal attributions for success and external attributions for failure are related to academic success because this pattern implies that failure is due to lack of effort, and thus unstable, fleeting, and unlikely to reoccur (Henry, Martinko, & Pierce, 1993; Weiner, 1979). Achievement attribution researchers have demonstrated that both children and college students who attribute academic failures internally (e.g., low ability) have more negative academic outcomes, whereas those who attribute failure externally (e.g., 'not trying hard enough') show improvement (Brownlow & Reasinger, 2000; Diener & Dweck, 1978; Dweck, 1975; Dweck & Bush, 1976; Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999; Martinez & Sewell, 2000; Peterson & Barrett, 1987).

Of importance to stereotype threat research, gender stereotypes can influence patterns of achievement attributions. Observers (male and female) tend to attribute men's success to high ability and women's success to luck, reflecting the gender stereotype of higher competence among males than females (Deaux & Emswiller, 1974; Dweck & Reppucci, 1973; Etaugh & Brown, 1975; Reyna, 2000). Regarding self-attributions, female college students often show a more negative pattern (attributing their failures to low ability) than males, who tend to show more self-enhancing attribution styles; this difference is most evident within male-dominated academic domains (e.g., math; Beyer, 1998; Kiefer & Shih, 2006).

Intervention studies in schools (e.g., Good et al., 2003; Wilson & Linville, 1982, 1985) have shown that students can be taught more positive attribution styles (e.g., to take credit for successes and not to internalize failures; see Robertson, 2000, for a review). One short intervention wherein college students read peer testimonials or viewed videos of peers attributing their academic struggles to temporary, unstable factors immediately performed better on a test, and showed higher grade point averages and retention rates one year later (Wilson & Linville, 1982, 1985).

Furthermore, Good and colleagues (2003) later demonstrated that a similar attributional modeling intervention protected academic outcomes only among negatively stereotyped (ethnic minority and female) students. These targeted effects were presented as evidence of the ability of attributional style training not just to improve general academic performance but to specifically attenuate stereotype threat processes.

The attribution of failure to one's stable identity can also be diminished by de-emphasizing the biological (i.e., 'stable') bases of race and gender. For instance, women were less susceptible to stereotype threat when they read experiential explanations of gender differences in math compared to genetic explanations (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2006), and ethnic minority students performed better on a quantitative test after learning about the social construction of race (Shih, Bonam, Sanchez, & Peck, 2007). The success of short-term interventions aimed at attribution training offers hope for the development of new interventions promoting positive attribution patterns among female STEM students.

### ***Self-Affirmation Interventions***

Stereotype threat is threatening to the self-concept, and even conceptions of one's ingroup (Walton & Cohen, 2007). People must perceive that they have the ability to deal with threat in order to overcome it. 'Self-affirmation' increases people's psychological resources, strength, and perceived ability to deal with adversity. Interventions that make use of self-affirmation strategies thus help people feel like they have the strength and motivation to deal with threat.

Using a simple writing exercise, Cohen and colleagues (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006) reduced threat appraisals among African American seventh-graders by having them complete a series of short writing assignments about their 'personal values' such as religion, family, and relationships with friends. Control groups wrote about value-neutral topics. The self-affirmation

exercise bolstered their self-integrity, which increased their perceived ability to cope. As a result, these students earned significantly higher GPAs than control group students at the end of the academic year.

Women in physics who completed the self-affirmation writing exercise at the beginning of an academic term also showed improvements in performance compared to a control group (Miyake et al., 2010). This result emerged particularly among women who initially endorsed gender-STEM stereotypes, suggesting that this intervention technique may be particularly useful for women who are most vulnerable to stereotype threat: those with greatest awareness of the stereotype and concerns that it may be true (Shapiro, 2011).

### **APPLICATIONS: GENDER STEREOTYPE THREAT BEYOND THE LAB**

Because stereotype threat effects and the methods to reduce them have been so reliably demonstrated in the lab, researchers, educators and others have a great interest in knowing its generalizability to real-world evaluative contexts. Does the threat of confirming stereotypes have a significant impact on important life outcomes such as performance on standardized tests in educational and vocational fields? This question is of vital importance because test scores often serve as important gateways into higher education, better jobs, and advancement not only in academia or business, but also within male-dominated institutions such as the military. If the threat of appearing stereotype-confirming impedes the test performance of stereotyped targets while those who are not stereotyped take tests free from this burden, this has immense real-world implications for social justice. Thus, researchers have been keen to assess the degree to which stereotype threat operates outside of the lab, in common testing situations.

At first glance, translating laboratory research methods on stereotype threat to applied settings may seem to be a relatively straightforward

task. However, there are several significant issues to be considered. First, many laboratory procedures used to induce or reduce stereotype threat are not feasible in applied contexts. For example, it is unrealistic to describe a standardized academic test such as the US SAT as 'non-diagnostic' of ability, or to describe a quantitative test as 'gender fair' (Spencer et al., 1999) when in fact men and women do historically score differently on the test. Second, real-world testing environments are likely fraught with sources of uncontrolled error variance that can reduce the detection of stereotype threat effects on performance. Such sources of error variance, including the gender and racial compositions of groups in the testing setting (e.g., Inzlicht & Ben-Zeev, 2000; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002), are often addressed and manipulated in laboratory settings, but are unlikely to be controlled or measured in most everyday test settings. These uncontrolled factors quite likely add unexplained variability to data in real-world settings, obscuring the actual effect of stereotype-confirmation concern. Finally, because real-world testing settings typically involve high-stakes outcomes, such as opportunities for education, training, or employment, an ethical question arises. How can some test-takers be randomly assigned to conditions that are predicted to diminish their outcomes?

Despite the complexities surrounding the task, researchers have focused efforts on testing stereotype threat predictions in real testing situations. Some of this work has used existing data to test models of what should emerge in the data if stereotype threat is indeed operating (e.g., Cullen, Hardison, & Sackett, 2004). Other research examined stereotype threat in real-world classrooms using lab-based materials and manipulations (e.g., Croizet & Claire, 1998; Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003). Finally, a small number of studies actually manipulated threat on real college placement tests, which determined meaningful outcomes for the test-takers. Namely, test-takers were randomly assigned to indicate their race and gender either prior to

or after completing a real placement test (Stricker & Ward, 2004).

Using these various approaches, evidence has emerged supporting real-world effects of stereotype threat. First, experiments on stereotype threat interventions implemented in real classrooms (described above) provide important demonstrations of how stereotype threat is evinced in student experiences, as female and ethnic minority students performed worse than students not targeted by negative stereotypes in non-intervention control groups, and benefitted in groups receiving the interventions (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Cohen et al., 2006; Good et al., 2003; Miyake et al., 2010; Wilson & Linville, 1982, 1985). Perhaps demonstrating the universality of stereotype threat effects, researchers have shown that stereotype threat lowered in-class test scores for German adolescents (Keller & Dauenheimer, 2003), and French undergraduates (Croizet & Claire, 1998) targeted by stereotypes (female students in math, and students from low income backgrounds, respectively). Finally, stereotype threat appears to influence non-academic real-world outcomes as well. When a soccer task was presented as irrelevant to stereotypes about women's athletic skills, female soccer players' performance improved (Chalabaev, Sarrazin, Stone, & Curry, 2008).

Although there is solid experimental evidence of how stereotype threat affects outcomes, results of other studies seemingly refute the applicability of stereotype threat effects outside of the lab. In the best-known demonstration of how threat seemingly failed to emerge in an actual testing situation, Stricker and Ward (2004) used a standard manipulation of stereotype threat, indicating one's race and gender either prior to or after taking a test (Steele & Aronson, 1995), among-test takers in two settings: high school Advanced Placement (AP) calculus testing, and community college students taking Computerized Placement Tests (CPT). They compared groups in which test-takers reported their gender and race either before or after taking the test, and used two specific criteria

to determine whether results indicated both ‘statistical and practical significance’. Specifically, results were considered ‘significant’ if the result met the statistical significance criteria of  $p < 0.05$ , and the associated effect size *eta* was greater than or equal to 0.10 (following guidelines for effect size significance described by Cohen, 1988).

By these indicators, Stricker and Ward concluded that the stereotype threat manipulation had no significant effect on men’s and women’s AP calculus test scores and CPT scores. Other researchers have also failed to find significant effects of threat outside of the lab (e.g., Cullen et al., 2004; Gillespie, Converse, & Kriska, 2010). The lack of significant translation of stereotype threat findings (so robust in the lab) to real-world test-taking contexts is striking in light of intervention work showing that actions based on stereotype threat theory improve outcomes for stereotyped group members. To address this inconsistency, Danaher and Crandall (2008) reanalyzed Stricker and Ward’s (2004) data, providing a different picture of these results. Specifically, they applied an *eta* criterion of 0.05 rather than 0.10 (retaining the  $p < 0.05$  criterion). Using this small change, Danaher and Crandall argued that the effect of asking participants to report their race or gender either before or after the test had ‘very large practical effects, with real theoretical meaning’ (p. 1647), particularly regarding AP calculus scores. These authors proposed that the practical size of this effect shows that girls improved their performance from 67% to 88% of boys’ performance, simply by reporting their gender after completing the calculus test rather than before. Accordingly, the authors concluded that in 2004, 4,763 more female students would have received AP calculus credit (by virtue of their improved scores) as a result of delayed reporting of their gender.

Sackett, Hardin, and Cullen (2004) have questioned the general interpretation of stereotype threat findings as ‘accounting for the racial gap’ (and presumably the gender gap) in test scores. They contend that because the

original demonstrations of stereotype threat accounted for previous SAT scores, participants from different groups were essentially equalized in terms of previous performance. Thus, members of both groups would be expected to perform equally on the test – as occurs in ‘no threat’ conditions. The finding that group differences emerge only under ‘threat’ conditions is therefore interpreted to mean that reported group differences are an artifact of ‘adding threat’ in the lab. That is, threat manipulations are argued to produce test score differences rather than reflecting real-world testing experiences. Addressing this critique, Walton and Spencer (2009) made the case that women and racial/ethnic minorities who have had some academic success actually have greater ‘latent ability’ than non-minorities with similar test scores. In two meta-analyses, they show that when threat is removed (i.e., in ‘safe’ conditions), women and racial minorities actually perform *better* than non-minority men *at the same level of previous performance*. Stereotyped students are able to ‘catch up’ to non-targeted groups with similar prior performance only when threat is removed. This suggests that the test scores used to ‘equalize’ performance are already artificially depressed for groups targeted by negative stereotypes. This demonstrates stigmatized students’ strong underlying potential, which is too often dampened by concerns about confirming stereotypes – even on real-world tests that researchers use to ‘match performance.’

## CONCLUSION

Stereotype threat research shows that awareness and concern about stereotypes in evaluative settings has a strong and negative effect on women and girls. These effects have important implications for women’s and girls’ life outcomes, such as representation in STEM fields. An important take-home point of our review is that the experience of stereotype threat is situational; the research does not imply that women underperform relative

to men in all settings, or that girls will always be less interested in mathematics than boys. Instead, stereotype threat research points out that women and girls have excitement for and can excel in domains in which they are negatively stereotyped when the environment signals that stereotypes are irrelevant. In this sense stereotype threat research is heartening; it suggests that solutions to gender gaps in educational outcomes may be addressed, perhaps in large-scale ways, by educators and policy-makers who are capable of shaping environments to reduce threat. In order to effect such change, they must first be informed about this burgeoning body of research findings.

For people looking to institute threat-free environments, stereotype threat intervention research provides some promising leads. For example, self-affirmation interventions are simple techniques that can have significant and relatively long-term benefits for stereotype-vulnerable students. In addition, providing role models, especially ingroup members modeling attainable success, can help. Although institutional change may entail considerable time and effort, there is a lot that individual teachers can do to change the climate in their classroom to reduce the relevance of stereotypes. Examples include emphasizing commonalities between gender groups (Rosenthal et al., 2007), avoiding unnecessary divisions by gender in the classroom (Bigler & Liben, 2007), and introducing counterstereotypic role models (Marx & Roman, 2002), perhaps by incorporating examples of successful women into the general course curriculum (Rios, Stewart, & Winter, 2010).

Perhaps most importantly, the negative effects of stereotype threat can be significantly reduced by simply learning about stereotype threat research (Johns et al., 2005). Informing women that concern about stereotypes can influence concentration and thus performance on stereotype-relevant tests can improve performance, even in environments that continue to highlight stereotypes or induce testing concerns. Therefore, educators and policy-makers can benefit from being

informed about stereotype threat research in order to develop interventions, but teachers can also help their students by letting them know about the demonstrated effects of social stereotypes on women and girls. Finally, the more people know about the influence of stereotype threat, the less the gender gap may be attributed to intrinsic gender differences in ability or interests. In many ways our society has a lot to gain by increasing the general population's awareness of stereotype threat research.

## NOTE

- 1 For this reason, researchers, including Steele and colleagues, have introduced the term 'social identity threat' which includes socially privileged groups, such as whites and men, as potential targets of stereotype threat under some circumstances. However, in this chapter we retain the term 'stereotype threat' to connect this research clearly to societal stereotypes, in light of our focus on external influences on academic outcomes for women and girls.

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# Ceilings, Cliffs, and Labyrinths: Exploring Metaphors for Workplace Gender Discrimination

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## INTRODUCTION

It has been more than 25 years since the ‘glass ceiling’ metaphor was popularized by the *Wall Street Journal* (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986) to describe women’s inability to reach the upper echelons of leadership. Now metaphors abound to describe the challenges that women and other underrepresented groups face in business and in politics. We have all manner of structural barriers that can contribute to gender inequality – from ‘sticky floors’ (Booth, Francesconi, & Frank, 2003) to ‘maternal walls’ (J. Williams, 2001), from ‘leaky pipelines’ (Blickenstaff, 2005) to ‘glass escalators’ (C. L. Williams, 1992). There are also creative extensions of these metaphors. Some of these encapsulate the experience of other marginalized groups, such as those based on sexuality, as in the case of the ‘pink ceiling’ (Czyzelska, 2000); some capture barriers in particular sectors, such as the ‘brass ceiling’ in the military (Iskra, 2008) or the ‘celluloid ceiling’ in the

film-making industry (Lauzen, 2006); and yet others describe barriers that arise at the intersection of multiple minority group memberships, such as the ‘concrete wall’ that women of color must climb or chip away at before they can even approach the glass ceiling (Bell & Nkomo, 2001).

Such metaphors provide a framework for our thinking about certain groups’ underrepresentation in particular roles or in leadership positions. As such, they can be seen as a novel way of framing an idea, as a heuristic to simplify our understanding, or as a powerful message to communicate a cause. However, metaphors are not only tools for facilitating communication; they imply a way of thinking that pervades our understanding of the world more generally (see Landau, Meier, & Keefer, 2010). As a result, a given metaphor can lead to new meanings and interpretations that are not inherent in the phenomenon that the metaphor is intended to describe (Cornelissen, 2006; Fauconnier & Turner, 1998; Weick, 1997).

The metaphors that have been used by academics, commentators, and policy-makers to describe gender inequality in the workplace have proven extremely successful insofar as they have enjoyed mainstream popularity with the press and the public at large. But importantly, these metaphors also impact on our understanding of the world, and they influence not only what we see, but also what we do *not* see. By highlighting certain aspects of a phenomenon, metaphors necessarily render other aspects less salient or even invisible (Morgan, 1997). For example, despite their variety, one characteristic that most popular metaphors capturing group-based inequality in the workplace have in common is that they focus on the obstacles and challenges that women and members of other underrepresented groups face as they try to succeed professionally; the career paths and experiences of (white, straight) men are merely implied as background for these metaphors.

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the various metaphors that have been used to illustrate gender discrimination in the workplace, focusing on the classic glass ceiling metaphor as well as on the ‘labyrinth’ (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and the ‘glass cliff’ (Ryan & Haslam, 2005) as more recent examples. We review discussions concerning the usefulness and appropriateness of these metaphors before we examine the potential problems associated with our reliance on metaphors that focus almost exclusively on the experiences of women, thereby implicitly reinforcing men as the norm that ‘goes without saying’ (Pratto, Korchmaros, & Hegarty, 2007). The goal of this chapter is not to provide an in-depth evaluation of any one particular metaphor (for work that has done so, see Bendl & Schmidt, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007) but instead to take a critical look at the general picture painted by these metaphors. Finally, we derive implications for organizational practice and for future research pertaining to gender inequality in the workplace.

## CEILINGS, WALLS, AND FLOORS: DESCRIBING BARRIERS

The metaphor of the glass ceiling was originally invoked to capture the essence of a phenomenon whereby women were reaching positions in middle management but seemed unable to obtain senior and executive positions – which were reserved almost exclusively for men. The glass ceiling thus describes the experience of women who find themselves blocked from higher-level leadership positions by dint of a seemingly invisible (hence the glass) and yet very real barrier (hence the ceiling) that their male colleagues do not have to contend with (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986).

When the metaphor emerged in the 1980s (first used by magazine editor Gay Bryant, see Frenkiel, 1984), it resonated well with many women’s experience of upper management as a realm that was in their sights and yet unattainable. In subsequent years, the glass ceiling metaphor became a highly successful tool for calling attention to gender discrimination in the workplace and for motivating both research (for an overview see Barreto, Ryan, & Schmitt, 2009) and practical interventions. This is best illustrated by the fact that when the US Department of Labor (1991) created a commission to address group-based ‘barriers ... preventing qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization’ (p. 1) it was titled the *Federal Glass Ceiling Commission* (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1987).

The extent to which such efforts to remove the glass ceiling have been successful is open to question. On the one hand, the proportion of women in executive positions has increased over the past few decades (e.g., Catalyst, 2009). At the same time, we are far from achieving equal representation, especially in top-level positions, and progress towards gender equality in upper management has been much slower than one might expect given the numbers in middle management in the 1980s. For example, in 2012, 85% of directorships in the FTSE 100 (the

top 100 companies on the London stock exchange) were held by men (Sealy & Vinnicombe, 2012), and the situation is similar in other European Countries (European Commission, 2010) and in the United States (Catalyst, 2009).

### **Factors Contributing to the Glass Ceiling**

These numbers demonstrate that although more women make it to the top today than at the time the metaphor of the glass ceiling was first coined, gender inequality in higher management persists. Much research has tried to understand the reasons for this inequality – although this research has not always been explicitly linked to the glass ceiling metaphor. We can give only a brief overview of some of this research here (for a more detailed compilation see Barreto et al., 2009), but two important factors are gender stereotypes and differential access to informal networks and mentoring.

Prevalent gender stereotypes portray women as communal (i.e., as affectionate, friendly, helpful, empathetic, cooperative) and men as agentic (i.e., as assertive, independent, self-confident, determined, competitive; e.g., Williams & Best, 1990). Importantly, these stereotypes about men match stereotypes about typical managers more closely than do stereotypes about women, a phenomenon dubbed the ‘think manager–think male’ effect (Schein, 1973; see also Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011). Because of these stereotypes, men often appear to be a better fit for leadership roles than women (see Eagly & Szcesny, 2009). Moreover, stereotypes are not only descriptive, but also highly prescriptive (prescribing what women and men – or managers – *should* be like). As a consequence, women in leadership roles often face a double bind where they run the risk of being seen as unsuitable for leadership when others perceive them as not being sufficiently agentic, and the risk of being disliked for appearing too masculine and ‘pushy’ when they do display such

qualities (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In this way, women who succeed in leadership roles often appear competent and agentic but this typically also entails being seen as less warm and not ‘feminine’ enough (Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991). Although men in powerful positions can face similar challenges, these are exaggerated for women (see Cikara & Fiske, 2009). Accordingly, overcoming the think manager–think male stereotype, remains one of the most important challenges for women aspiring to senior leadership positions (Wellington, Kropf, & Gerkovich, 2003).

Another factor that contributes to continued gender inequality in higher management is women’s restricted access to – often informal – support networks and ingroup favoritism within the ‘old boys’ club’ (Moore, 1988). Internal and external networks and support from senior colleagues and peers are key resources for career progression (Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000) and the lack of such support is a key predictor of workplace stress (Health and Safety Executive, 2005). However, men often have better access to these support networks than women (e.g., Adler, 2000; Ibarra, 1993) and this may not only help men to progress to senior positions, but it can also mean that they avoid the stressful experience of feeling left out or not fitting in – an experience that causes women to opt out of senior positions more frequently than men (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, & Wilson-Kovacs, 2009).

### **Walls, Floors, and Escalators: Other Metaphors Describing Structural Barriers**

Over the past two decades, the glass ceiling has inspired numerous other metaphors describing gender inequalities in the workplace. For example, ‘glass walls’ are said to confine women to management positions within certain sectors, such as human resources or marketing, that usually do not lead to senior positions (Miller, Kerr, & Reid, 1999). The ‘glass slipper’ effect describes a

process whereby romanticized implicit associations of men with heroism and chivalry reduce women's aspirations to powerful positions (Rudman & Heppen, 2003). The 'glass escalator' focuses on a phenomenon whereby men in stereotypically female professions, such as nursing or elementary school teaching, are promoted through career ranks in an accelerated fashion (C. L. Williams, 1992). In contrast to the other metaphors we describe in this chapter, the glass escalator focuses on men's progress, rather than women's lack of progress, a peculiarity that we will return to in more detail later.

Moving beyond the metaphorical glass, the descriptive use of barriers continues. The 'maternal wall' (J. Williams, 2001) describes additional barriers that women experience when they become mothers. For example, while parenthood is associated with higher wages for men (US Government Accountability Office, 2003), mothers earn only 60% of what fathers earn (see Crosby, Biernat, & Williams, 2004). The maternal wall is often explained in terms of women's own decisions to prioritize family over work. However, research points to the power of stereotypical thinking and behavior (e.g., Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004), and the constrained nature of mothers' choices resulting from organizational work norms and practices that treat family and job commitments as incompatible as well as from models of career success that are structured around men's lives and bodies (e.g., Crosby et al., 2004; Crosby & Sabattini, 2009).

While the glass ceiling focuses on factors that prevent women from entering the upper echelons, the metaphor of the 'sticky floor' focuses on factors that prevent them from leaving lower levels, so that they feel trapped in low-wage, low-mobility jobs (Noble, 1992). For example, empirical evidence demonstrates that when women and men with identical qualifications are appointed to the same pay rank, men are often appointed further up the scale than women (Booth et al.,

2003). Similarly, the gender wage gap widens at the bottom of salary scales (as well as at the top; Arulampalam, Booth, & Bryan, 2006). While these uses of the sticky floor metaphor focus on lower-paying jobs rather than on upper management, it has also been drawn upon in arguments that women hold themselves back from achieving leadership positions because of family commitments, perfectionism, or because they stay in the same roles for too long (Shambaugh, 2008).

A final structural metaphor that focuses less on particular barriers but rather captures their consequences is the 'leaky pipeline' (Berryman, 1983). This metaphor is often used to illustrate the higher drop-out rates of women in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and in academia more generally (e.g., Blickenstaff, 2005). For example, despite nearly equal representation of boys and girls among students who take physics in US high schools (with some variation in the levels of these courses), women earn only about one-fifth of bachelor's degrees in physics at US universities (Ivie & Nies Ray, 2005). Further along the pipeline, more women than men leave STEM fields for alternative careers (Marshall, 2008). Across all STEM fields, women earn 38% of bachelor's degrees but hold only 24% of jobs (National Science Foundation, 2007; US Department of Commerce, 2011). Thus, the metaphorical pipeline that carries students from secondary schools through university and on to a job in STEM or to higher academic positions 'leaks' at various stages.

### ***How Accurate and Useful Are These Metaphors?***

As outlined above, these various metaphors used to describe (workplace) gender inequality have enjoyed significant rhetorical success. They provide a useful linguistic handle to attract the attention of policy-makers, the media, and the wider public. Moreover, their vividness captures the imagination of researchers and practitioners, motivating

research projects and policy interventions alike. But now that consciousness has been raised, are such metaphors still useful?

According to Cornelissen and Kafouros (2008) the value of a metaphor in organizational theory depends on two factors: the extent to which it helps us conceptualize a complex phenomenon (explicatory impact) and the extent to which it creates new insights and ideas (generative impact). Thus, these structural metaphors will be useful if they provide an accurate representation of the situation and if they help us gain new insights into the experiences of women and men in the workplace.

Various authors across different academic fields have begun to question the accuracy and usefulness of the glass ceiling metaphor (e.g., Bendl & Schmidt, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Common critiques are that the metaphor of a single and impenetrable barrier shielding the upper echelons of management fails to capture the complexity of the situation (Altmann, Simpson, Baruch, & Burke, 2005) and falsely implies (a) that women and men have equal access to entry- and mid-level positions, and (b) that this barrier is absolute such that it is nearly impossible for women to reach senior or executive positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Thus, the increasing number of women in top management positions in recent years – however small it may be – seems to belie the glass ceiling metaphor, leading to uncertainty about whether it is still accurate (cf. Barreto et al., 2009). If a single woman breaks through the glass ceiling, is it considered shattered? Such an argument is, for instance, often made in Britain where it is claimed by some that the glass ceiling can no longer exist if a woman (Margaret Thatcher) has already occupied the most powerful political position in the country. To varying degrees, these critiques also apply to several other metaphors that focus on structural barriers like glass walls, the maternal wall, or the sticky floor.

One obvious consequence of these discussions is that researchers and commentators

have attempted to generate new metaphors that better encapsulate organizational realities. For example, the ‘firewall’ (Bendl & Schmidt, 2010) describes a more fluid, shifting, and context-specific barrier that everybody can pass through if they know the right password or codes. While this might capture the complexities of the situation better than the glass ceiling, it still gives the problematic impression of a single barrier that only needs to be overcome once; it also implies that individual ‘programmers’ intentionally write codes that keep certain people out (see Bendl & Schmidt, 2010). However, rather than being a form of overt exclusion, workplace gender inequality is often the result of relatively subtle and unintended processes (Agars, 2004; Blickenstaff, 2005; Dasgupta & Stout, 2012; Ryan & Haslam, 2007; Schmitt, Ellemers, & Branscombe, 2003).

Another criticism that can be leveled at these structural metaphors is their tendency to focus attention on *describing* the problem. The glass ceiling or the sticky floor direct our attention to the numbers of women in particular roles or positions, while the maternal wall or the leaky pipeline encourage us to identify when and where inequality takes place. Thus, while research in the area has illuminated some of the processes through which inequalities become manifest, the metaphors themselves encourage us to focus on mere numbers (with the exception of the glass slipper that does focus on an involved process). An alternative approach is to develop metaphors that place a greater emphasis on the *experiences* of women (and men) in the workplace. Below, we describe two of these metaphors in more detail: the ‘labyrinth’ (Eagly & Carli, 2007) and the ‘glass cliff’ (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007).

## LABYRINTHS AND CLIFFS: DESCRIBING EXPERIENCES

In response to the above criticisms, new metaphors have been coined. The labyrinth encapsulates the often circuitous paths that



women striving for leadership positions take (Eagly & Carli, 2007), while the glass cliff focuses on the circumstances under which they obtain these positions (Ryan & Haslam, 2005, 2007).

### ***The Labyrinth***

Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that the image of a glass ceiling as an absolute barrier is seriously outdated. They suggest that the notion of a labyrinth provides a more appropriate metaphor because women can obtain positions of organizational leadership (and do so in increasing numbers) but to get there they must navigate a labyrinth of expected and unexpected barriers, twists, turns, detours, and dead ends. Rather than a single barrier at the top, they face multiple difficulties along the way while men often follow a much straighter route with fewer obstacles. Instead of a glass ceiling just underneath the executive suite, a multitude of factors that disadvantage women and benefit men are seen to operate at all levels and to accumulate along an individual's career path. Eagly and Carli specify a number of key factors creating the labyrinth, including gender stereotypes and prejudice, differential access to social resources, and differences in domestic responsibilities.

As noted above, stereotypes based on think manager–think male associations cause men to appear more suitable for leadership than women. Such stereotypes also create a tricky double bind for women in leadership positions (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Perhaps as a result of such stereotypes, men still earn considerably more than women (Blau & Kahn, 2000; Kulich, Trojanowski, Ryan, Haslam, & Renneboog, 2011) and are more likely to be promoted (Blau & DeVaro, 2007) even when important factors such as education and experience are held constant. Importantly, instead of being a particular problem surrounding executive positions, these biases appear to operate at all levels of the organizational hierarchy (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Differences in women's and men's

support networks with peers and senior colleagues also make it more difficult for women to find their way through the labyrinth, while at the same time helping men to navigate through professional life and along career paths more smoothly.

Another important factor that adds twists and turns to women's career paths are domestic responsibilities. Although men in industrialized countries are increasingly contributing more to housework and childcare duties, women continue to do the bulk of this work (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Crosby & Sabattini, 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Mothers are also more likely than fathers to interrupt their careers and to work part-time (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Miree & Frieze, 1999) and even when they do not, decision-makers often assume that mothers have important domestic responsibilities and therefore cannot be promoted to demanding positions (Crosby & Sabattini, 2009).

In sum, the labyrinth as a metaphor identifies reasons for gender discrimination in the workplace that are very similar to those that have been seen to explain the glass ceiling and the maternal wall. Importantly, these processes do not form a unique barrier to boardrooms and executive positions. Instead, the unequal representation of women and men in these positions is the result of many obstacles along the way.

### ***The Glass Cliff***

While women are more likely than men to face challenges en route to leadership positions, they are also more likely to face challenges once they achieve them. In an archival analysis of appointments to the boards of FTSE 100 companies, Ryan and Haslam (2005) found that in a period of general financial downturn, companies that appointed a woman to their board had experienced a pattern of consistently poorer stock market performance in the months preceding the appointment than companies that had appointed a man. Similar patterns of favoring women for difficult leadership tasks in times

of crisis while preferring men under more promising circumstances have been demonstrated in additional archival studies in business (Haslam, Ryan, Kulich, Trojanowski, & Atkins, 2010) and politics (Ryan, Haslam, & Kulich, 2010), as well as in many experimental studies (e.g., Ashby, Ryan, & Haslam, 2007; Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Haslam & Ryan, 2008). In these experiments, participants typically read scenarios about an organization that is either performing well or in crisis, and then evaluate and/or choose between male and female candidates for a leadership position in this organization. Paralleling the findings of archival studies, participants in these scenario studies tend to favor male candidates for successful organizations and female candidates for organizations in crisis (for an overview see Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, & Haslam, in press).

To describe this pattern of appointing women in times of crisis and men in times of stability and organizational success, Ryan and Haslam (2005, 2007) coined the metaphor of the ‘glass cliff’ to capture the precariousness of the leadership positions that women are likely to obtain. This precariousness stems from the generally higher risk of failure associated with these positions and from the intense scrutiny and criticism that leaders face in times of organizational crisis (Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Among other factors, experimental studies of the glass cliff phenomenon again point to the importance of think manager–think male associations and additionally to stereotypes that portray women as better crisis managers (‘think crisis–think female’, Ryan et al., 2011). While perceptions of the typical manager include many more stereotypically male than female traits, descriptions of the *ideal* manager in times of crisis include more stereotypically female than male characteristics. Particularly important aspects of this think crisis–think female association are expectations that women are better people managers (Ryan et al., 2011) and will be able to garner more support than men from their colleagues and followers (Rink, Ryan,

& Stoker, 2012) – although there is also an element of women being set up to fail (Ryan et al., 2011; Ryan, Haslam, & Postmes, 2007).

In experimental studies, the ascription of traits capturing these think manager–think male and think crisis–think female stereotypes have been shown to predict the differential selection of men and women to leadership positions in times of success versus crisis (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010; Rink et al., 2012). Relatedly, women are perceived to represent the necessary change from a default male standard of leadership (e.g., Brown, Diekmann, & Schneider, 2011), particularly in historically male-dominated organizations (Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010).

In sum, although it is likely that the glass cliff is multiply determined (see Bruckmüller et al., in press; Ryan & Haslam, 2007), people seem to prefer men for leadership in most situations because male candidates better fit stereotypical assumptions of what leaders are (and should be) like. At the same time, women represent a change from the default think manager–think male standard, and are perceived as particularly skilled at bringing about the kind of change that is needed in a crisis.

## HOW METAPHORS FRAME OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Considering the metaphors for workplace gender discrimination as a whole it is immediately apparent that these metaphors focus almost exclusively on women and women’s experiences. Ceilings, walls, sticky floors, and glass slippers are holding women back from advancing to leadership positions, leaky pipelines predispose them to drop out, labyrinths make their career paths particularly difficult and complex, and glass cliffs make their lives risky and precarious once they have made it to the top.

The only obvious exception to this focus on women is the glass escalator. However,

although this metaphor could in principle describe men's faster advancement towards leadership in general, it is usually invoked to illustrate the career paths of men in prototypically female professions (C. L. Williams, 1992). We think that this is neither a coincidence, nor is it particularly surprising. Indeed, both the overwhelming tendency to focus on women and the challenges they face and the exception of the glass escalator can be understood in terms of the normative framework that informs explanations of group differences by both scientists and laypeople (e.g., Hegarty & Buechel, 2006; Miller, Taylor, & Buck, 1991). Drawing on this research we can also reflect on the implications of a metaphorical focus on women in describing and explaining gender inequalities in the workplace.

### ***Why a Focus on Women?***

One important function of conceptual metaphors – in research and dissemination as well as in basic social cognition – is that they help us understand and communicate complex social phenomena (Cornelissen & Kafouros, 2008; Landau et al., 2010). When people try to make sense of group differences, they tend not to focus on the difference itself, but instead to impose asymmetric figure-ground relationships by focusing on how one group ('the effect to be explained') differs from another group (Miller et al., 1991).

Research examining which groups are foregrounded as the effect to be explained and which groups are positioned as background has demonstrated that laypersons (Miller et al., 1991) as well as scientists (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006), and both women and men (Miller et al., 1991), explain gender differences by focusing on women more than on men. More generally, lower-status groups tend to be compared to the background norm of higher-status groups, and less typical groups tend to be compared to prototypical groups (Hegarty & Bruckmüller, 2013; Pratto, Hegarty, & Korchmaros, 2007). Given that men generally enjoy higher status in society

than women (Eagly, 1987) and are perceived to be more prototypical leaders than women (Eagly & Szcesny, 2009) it is not surprising that our understanding of workplace gender discrimination, and the metaphors we develop to illustrate such inequality, are focused on women, while men form the less visible background for these metaphors. The exception, the glass escalator, also proves the rule. It focuses on men's faster advancement to leadership positions in contexts in which women are more prototypical, so that again, the less prototypical group becomes the effect to be explained.

### ***Implications of Asymmetric Metaphors and Explanations***

Importantly, metaphors that are focused on women (and other 'atypical' groups in leadership) are not only a symptom of this explanatory focus on women, they are also likely to reproduce it. Although research on workplace gender inequality has repeatedly demonstrated the importance of think manager–think male associations (Eagly & Szcesny, 2009) and of male-centered norms for career progression (Crosby et al., 2004), the metaphors reviewed above generally prompt us to focus our understanding of gender discrimination on women. Accordingly, we ask why women are not 'breaking through' the glass ceiling (or what they need to do in order to break through), why women are put on glass cliffs, why they 'leak' out of the pipeline, and why they are held back by walls, or have to take extra turns and detours in a labyrinth. Relatedly, although the glass slipper describes the importance of heroic images of men, it primarily focuses on the reactions of women, asking how this image affects women's aspirations to leadership.

We could just as well ask why men are more likely to be appointed to leadership positions and under more promising circumstances, why men stay in the pipeline, or why their career paths include more shortcuts and fewer dead ends. However, these questions seem to require an extra mental step. Indeed,

while writing this chapter we not only observed ourselves slipping into the habit of focusing more on women than on men despite our best intention to avoid doing so; in many places it seemed simply impossible to describe these metaphors with an equal focus on women and men while writing in a way that was parsimonious and clear.

Given this overwhelming tendency to see women as the effect to be explained, the question is whether this focus on women is in any way problematic. Metaphors such as the glass ceiling have, after all, proven extremely successful in highlighting workplace gender discrimination and in inspiring research and interventions. However, since metaphors shape our understanding of social concepts and phenomena as well as the way we react to them (Landau et al., 2010), the benefits of communicating gender inequality in the workplace by means of these metaphors very likely come at a cost. One obvious consequence is that by highlighting women's experiences and the barriers they face, discussions of gender inequality are likely to focus on women's attributes and on stereotypes about them (Eagly & Karau, 2002), on women's career and family planning choices (Shambaugh, 2008), and so on. In doing so, such metaphors might render other important aspects of gender inequality less visible (cf. Morgan, 1997), such as stereotypes about men (e.g., Bruckmüller & Branscombe, 2010), or organizational practices and culture, like informal networks within the 'old boys' club' (Moore, 1988). Moreover, focusing explanations of gender differences on women can imply that they, rather than men, need to change their behavior for differences to be reduced (Miller et al., 1991; but see also Hegarty & Pratto, 2001).

In sum, the explanatory focus on women makes gender discrimination an issue for women rather than men. It implies that it is something about women that causes gender inequality and that it is women who will have to change to reduce this inequality, for example by breaking through metaphorical ceilings and walls. In this way, women-focused

metaphors avoid confronting men with uncomfortable truths about their own privilege and advantage (Branscombe, 1998). Indeed, even the metaphor of the glass escalator, despite its focus on men, fits this general pattern. It specifically directs our attention to men in stereotypically female professions, thereby implying that men are only, or at least particularly, advantaged in these specific contexts. This obscures the fact that men enjoy faster promotion through career ranks in most other professions as well (Blau & De Varo, 2007). In other words, by contextually limiting the discussion of gender inequality to certain occupations, the glass escalator metaphor distracts us from the pervasiveness of male advantage despite its explanatory focus on men's career paths.

As the research we have summarized demonstrates, researchers who concern themselves with workplace gender discrimination have often managed to escape an exclusive focus on women and to detect the importance of factors 'backgrounded' by these metaphors, such as the think manager – think male effect or the importance of male-centered work norms for the maternal wall. The extent to which these less visible causes receive the attention that they deserve and to what extent they can be effectively communicated to policy-makers, the media, and the public at large when illustrations of workplace gender discrimination revolve around metaphors focusing on women is, however, questionable.

Even more important, recent research has demonstrated that a focus on women as the effect to be explained and the implicit assumption that men are the normative background in leadership may have other unintended consequences. For example, positioning a group as the background norm leads to ascriptions of higher status and power to this group, and to the attribution of stereotypic traits that are often used to legitimize status inequalities, namely higher agency and lower communion (Bruckmüller & Abele, 2010). Along these lines, one study found that framing gender differences in leadership in terms of how female leaders

differ from male leaders (as most people would do spontaneously) leads to the perception of greater status differences between women and men, stronger belief in the legitimacy of such status differences, and higher endorsement of gender stereotypes than when male leaders are compared to female leaders (Bruckmüller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012).

In addition, a focus on lower-status groups when explaining group differences causes stereotypes about these groups to be 'aired' more often by means of a two-step process (Hegarty & Pratto, 2001). First, their atypicality causes lower-status groups such as women, gay men and lesbians, or ethnic minorities to become the effect to be explained (see Pratto et al., 2007). Then, people selectively draw upon stereotypes about these groups (rather than on their stereotypes about men, straight people, or whites) to explain observed differences.

Moreover, members of lower-status or atypical groups who must explain why their own group differs from a higher-status or more typical group (rather than vice versa) feel stigmatized and less positive about their group membership. In a recent set of studies, both single participants (Studies 1 and 2) and left-handed participants (Study 3) indicated lower collective self-esteem after reading or writing about how their own group differs from the respective outgroup of coupled people or right-handers than after reading or writing about how this outgroup differs from their ingroup. Members of higher-status or more typical groups (coupled and right-handed participants) were unaffected by the explanatory focus in the discussion of group differences (Bruckmüller, 2013).

Together, then, this research points to a dynamic process through which status differences and habits of framing group comparisons mutually reinforce one another. Group status and prototypicality influence who becomes the effect to be explained and this framing in turn stigmatizes atypical groups (Bruckmüller, 2013) and communicates their lower status and power (Bruckmüller et al., 2012). Transferred to the context of metaphors

for gender discrimination, these findings suggest that a focus on women when illustrating and explaining gender inequality will implicitly reinforce and legitimize men's higher status and normativity in leadership and will cause women to feel stigmatized as peculiar exceptions in need of explanation.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Although the metaphors we have described focus on somewhat different observations and contexts and on different organizational levels, there are some dominant themes that emerge from research on the phenomena that they are meant to describe. Below, we summarize some of the practical implications for organizational policy and practice and for research on workplace gender discrimination that arise from the research itself, and from the use of women-focused metaphors.

### *Implications for Organizational Practice*

Dominant themes that have emerged from the research summarized here include gender stereotypes, social networks and mentoring, and the challenges of juggling work and family commitments. For each of these themes, practical implications can be derived. Importantly, with their focus on women and the barriers they encounter in the workplace, metaphors suggest particular kinds of interventions or solutions.

For instance, as Schiebinger (1999) has pointed out, the leaky pipeline metaphor directs the focus of interventions on recruiting and retaining more women to STEM fields (e.g., US Department of Commerce, 2011) rather than on considering changes to the system itself. Likewise, strategies designed to help individual women break through the glass ceiling or get off the sticky floor often recommend the modification of women's approaches to leadership. Such advice includes avoiding the 'sticky trap' of



perfectionism (Shambaugh, 2008) or finding 'a [leadership] style with which male managers are comfortable' (Catalyst, 2000). Taken together, a focus on women encourages organizations to 'fix' women, for instance, by offering them special training to increase their assertiveness or their leadership skills, by bolstering their self-confidence, or by helping them find the right work-life balance through better time management.

However, as intimated above, such strategies not only focus on women, but also focus the blame for existing inequality on women. They send the message that women fail to make it to the top because they make the wrong choices or have the wrong personalities, styles, or strategies. In addition, they implicitly place the burden of redressing gender inequality on women, on *individual* women in particular. This may not only direct attention away from an organization's responsibility in creating (un)equal opportunities. It may also prevent women from joining forces and taking collective action – just like tokenistic practices that allow individual women to gain high-status positions while simultaneously keeping the majority of women out can undermine collective action by promoting the idea that individual women can make it to the top, if only they work hard enough (see Schmitt, Spoor, Danaher, & Branscombe, 2009).

Moreover, since a focus on women can enhance gender stereotypes (Bruckmüller et al., 2012) and will likely be perceived as stigmatizing (Bruckmüller, 2013; Crosby & Sabattini, 2009; Miller et al., 1991), women-centered strategies may, paradoxically, exacerbate, rather than ameliorate, the problem. A more effective strategy for organizations – and one that becomes more obvious if we draw back from a focus on women and attempt to see the bigger picture – may be to address the pernicious effects of often implicit gender stereotypes within companies, for example, by means of diversity training for managers and decision-makers.

Considering the importance of the stereotypical association between men and leadership, diversity in management is not only a goal, but also a means to achieve this goal. More diverse

management should weaken stereotypical perceptions of the typical manager as male (and white, straight, middle-class, and able-bodied). Affirmative action programs are one way to facilitate the first steps towards a more diverse management. However, these programs are often perceived as stigmatizing by the groups they are intended to support and can lead to more negative perceptions of the (presumed) beneficiaries of these policies (Crosby, Sabbintini, & Aizawa, Chapter 29 this volume; Iyer, 2009). One would imagine that these problems are exacerbated when gender inequality is understood as being about women and when affirmative action programs are designed and communicated with a particular focus on women and other minorities.

Another recurring theme in discussions of gender inequality in the workplace is the importance of networks and mentoring. Focusing less on the barriers that women face, and more on informal support systems within organizations and the workings of the old boys' club, leads to somewhat different recommendations for organizations and policy-makers. A focus on women might lead to special mentoring and support systems being instituted for women, although those again risk placing the blame for gender inequality as well as the burden of reducing it on women and can be experienced as stigmatizing. In contrast, a focus on the workings of informal support networks in the 'background' might encourage organizations to recognize that men often have greater access to such informal networks (e.g., Adler, 2000), and to work towards reducing the impact of such networks, for example, by introducing more transparent appointment and promotion procedures and providing more structured and formalized networking and mentoring programs throughout the organization that all employees can benefit from.

Finally, because of the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities between women and men, work-life balance programs are an important step towards reducing gender inequality more generally, and for addressing the 'maternal wall' in particular (Crosby et al., 2004; Eagly & Carli, 2007). However, work-life balance

programs are often underutilized and one important reason for their limited success is the stigmatizing effect of using these programs (Crosby & Sabattini, 2009). Organizational work norms often portray 'face time' (i.e., actual time spent in the workplace) as the most important and most reliable indicator of productivity (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 1999). As a consequence, employees – both men and women – often fear that taking advantage of work–life balance opportunities such as flexible or part-time work will be perceived as an indication of low job commitment and will therefore negatively impact on their career (e.g., Bagilhole, 2006; Eaton, 2003). Accordingly, work–life programs that are framed as a response to women's unique needs create additional challenges for women, especially mothers, by stigmatizing them and reinforcing the notion that they are not 'ideal' employees (Crosby & Sabattini, 2009; J. Williams, 2001).

A more promising approach may be to shift the focus from the question of how organizations can help individual women to juggle the different demands of work and family to the problematic work norms that unnecessarily require employees to be constantly available or that reward hours on the job rather than actual performance on measurable outcomes (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In line with this point, work–life balance policies, such as flexible work arrangements, that are aimed at both women and men, not only increase employees' productivity, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction (Thompson et al., 1999), they also appear to have the highest chance of reducing workplace gender inequality (see Crosby & Sabattini, 2009).

### ***Implications for Research and Dissemination***

The present analysis of metaphors also has important implications for researchers examining workplace gender discrimination. Indeed, we are conscious that as researchers we are not immune to the allure of a women-focused metaphor and we do not intend to argue that we should abstain from the use of metaphors

altogether. Conceptual metaphors are essential for understanding abstract or complex (social) constructs (Landau et al., 2010) and therefore play an integral role in the creation and communication of scientific knowledge (Bicchieri, 1988). Nonetheless, there is a need to be more conscious of the metaphors we select and the implications that they may have. This includes, but is not limited to, the need for greater reflexivity about the focus of our explanations, keeping in mind that there are many different ways to frame a question and different perspectives from which we can examine any given phenomenon. Considering the power of metaphors to shape the way we think about the world, we should exercise caution when using common metaphors and when coining new ones to communicate our findings to stakeholders in organizations and to the public at large. The 'catchy' metaphor that comes to us most easily might often be one that renders women the effect to be explained and thereby implicitly reinforces men as the norm in leadership.

Perhaps, then, it is time to move away from the myriad of women-focused glass-metaphors and to instead turn our attention to the privileges and advantages that men often enjoy, and the reasons for these advantages. This may place us in a better position to address the stereotypes that portray men as the default in leadership, to question the organizational cultures and work norms that are structured around men's lives and bodies, and to untangle the informal networks within the old boys' club that underlie gender inequality in the workplace.

### **CONCLUSION**

The multitude of metaphors that have been invoked to illustrate workplace gender discrimination have proven extremely powerful in drawing attention to the challenges that women face in organizations and in raising awareness for the sometimes very subtle workings of gender discrimination. They also facilitate understanding of and communication about these problems. Yet, by placing our focus on women, women's experiences, and

the barriers and challenges that women face, these metaphors may be counterproductive in the long run. They implicitly suggest that gender discrimination in the workplace is predominantly a problem for women. They may thus not only carry the danger of creating detrimental blind spots in our endeavors to understand workplace gender discrimination and in the interventions we develop to redress it. They may also implicitly strengthen gender stereotypes and subtly reify status differences between women and men.

In conclusion, we think that the time has come to take a step back from metaphors that make women the effect to be explained and to turn our lens to what has been hidden in the background. Staying within the conceptual framework of the metaphors we discussed, the bottom line is that the time has come not just to see the glass, but to see through it.

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# Psychological Perspectives on Gender in Negotiation

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## INTRODUCTION

As a fundamental form of human interaction, negotiation is essential to the management of relationships, the coordination of paid and household labor, the distribution of resources, and the creation of economic value. Understanding the effects of gender on negotiation gives us important insights into how micro-level interactions contribute to larger social phenomena, such as gender gaps in pay and authority. Recent research on gender in negotiation has shown us how gender stereotypes constrain women from negotiating access to resources and opportunities through lowered performance expectations and gendered behavioral constraints. However, this widening research stream is also beginning to provide hints as to how individuals and organizations can overcome these limitations to women's negotiation potential.

In this chapter I provide a brief history of psychological research on gender in negotiation, starting with the study of gender stereotypic personality attributions and transitioning to a more sophisticated analysis of the effects of gender stereotypes on negotiation behaviors

and performance. I review contemporary research on gender in negotiation using two interrelated frameworks. The first outlines the ways in which gender stereotypes influence negotiation, the second outlines situational factors that help predict when gender effects are likely to emerge in negotiation. These include ambiguity, which facilitates the emergence of gender effects, and gender triggers, which influence the salience and relevance of gender within the negotiating context. Finally, I highlight practical implications of research on gender in negotiation and point to future research directions that could transform insights about barriers to women's negotiation performance into positive levers for change.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER IN NEGOTIATION

The story to date of the psychological study of gender in negotiation starts and ends with gender stereotypes. Initially, researchers anticipated that gender would function like a personality variable, predicting men's and

women's negotiation behavior and performance in gender stereotypical ways. Namely, women would be relationship-oriented cooperators, and men would be analytically minded competitors. If men and women fulfilled these expectations, then male negotiators would be more effective than female negotiators at 'claiming value' (i.e., gaining a larger share of the value to be divided) and potentially also at 'creating value' (i.e., searching for trades that expand the value to be divided; Lax & Sebenius, 1986). However, women might be more reliable advocates for peace in a conflict situation (Maoz, 2009). Early scholars of gender in negotiation had little success substantiating these stereotypes as consistent predictors of men's and women's negotiation performance, but contemporary scholars have shown that these gender stereotypic expectations continue to thrive, sometimes to virulent effect.

In the first comprehensive review of research on gender in negotiation, Rubin and Brown (1975) reported a confusing array of results in which women were sometimes more cooperative than men but at other times defied expectations by acting significantly more competitively. In particular, they observed that women's behavior seemed to be more contingent than men's on the behavior of the other negotiator; for instance, women struck back more forcefully than men against perceived defection. Sticking with the premise of gender as trait, Rubin and Brown tentatively proposed that women's personalities might make them less predictable than men, such that they are more 'interpersonally oriented' and, therefore, less analytic and more reactive to their counterparts' behavior. Rubin and Brown's chapter stood for more than two decades as the primary statement on the topic of gender in the negotiation field.

During the 1980s, while social psychologists were developing theories of gender as a social role (Eagly, 1987) and contextual phenomenon (Deaux & Major, 1987), mainstream negotiation scholars disregarded gender as a failed personality variable. In the mid-1990s, psychological researchers started

paying more attention to the social construction of gender in negotiation. Informed by advances in psychological research on gender in social behavior, they started investigating situational factors that might moderate gender effects in negotiation.

Walters, Stuhlmacher, and Meyer (1998) published a path-breaking meta-analysis of gender and negotiation behavior. Synthesizing 35 years of research, they found a modest overall tendency for women to be more cooperative negotiators than men. However, this effect was driven by the results of face-to-face negotiations and did not appear to extend to anonymous bargaining exercises, such as matrix games, in which parties are typically physically separated and make a parsimonious set of behavioral choices with differential expected payoffs (e.g., 'cooperate' or 'defect' in the Prisoner's Dilemma). They proposed that the potential for stereotype conformity increased with the potential for communication between negotiators (e.g., greater conformity in face-to-face interactions than in written or scripted ones).

Stuhlmacher and Walters (1999) conducted a meta-analysis of 21 studies of explicit negotiations over issues such as sales or compensation (i.e., no matrix games). They found that men negotiated higher individual payoffs than did women, but also observed preliminary evidence that stereotypical gender differences might be greatest in masculine-stereotyped negotiations (e.g., compensation or car sales) and when negotiation roles align with gender stereotypic status differences (e.g., male employer, female candidate). These meta-analyses stoked researchers' curiosity about when, why, and how gender effects in negotiation emerge.

During the first decade of the 21st century, research on the content and implications of gender stereotypes in negotiation became an important research area. Kray and Thompson (2004) published an extensive qualitative review of the literature, theorizing that stereotypes were the root of gender effects in negotiation. Informed by their own work on stereotype fulfillment and reactance in negotiation (Kray,

Galinsky, & Thompson, 2002; Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004; Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001), they argued for a situational approach to the study of gender in negotiation. In their review, they illustrated ebbs and flows of gender effects across negotiation contexts. With the benefit of stronger psychological theory and empirical evidence than was available to Rubin and Brown (1975), they swept aside the notion of gender as a personality type and argued for deeper investigation of how stereotypes influence negotiation performance.

### **GENDER STEREOTYPES IN NEGOTIATION: USE, FULFILLMENT, REACTANCE, AND POLICING**

The contemporary literature on gender in negotiation can be seen in terms of four ways in which gender stereotypes influence negotiation behavior. In this section, I first report on evidence that negotiators *use* gender stereotypes as strategic information. Second, I illustrate how negotiators *fulfill* the prophecies of gender stereotypic expectations. Third, I explain how negotiators sometimes also *react* to gender stereotypes by defying gendered behavioral expectations. Finally, I present evidence of gender stereotype *policing and conformity*, which is particularly constraining for female negotiators.

#### ***Use of Gender Stereotypes as Strategic Information***

The stereotypes of male and female negotiators align with the broader stereotypes that men are agentic and women communal (Eagly, 1987): male negotiators are expected to be relatively self-interested and competitive, whereas female counterparts are expected to be more other-concerned and cooperative (for reviews, see Eckel, de Oliveira, & Grossman, 2008; Kray & Thompson, 2004). Multiple studies suggest that negotiators use these gender stereotypes to infer what type of counterparts they are facing, what type of constituents they are

representing, and how they themselves are likely to be perceived – ‘tough’ like a man or ‘soft’ like a woman.

#### ***Offer Behavior***

This strategic use of gender stereotypes is sometimes reflected in negotiators’ offer behavior (i.e., initial proposals and the exchange of counterproposals). In both laboratory experiments and field studies, researchers have found that negotiators adjust their offers depending on whether they are negotiating with a man or a woman. For instance, in two studies of the Ultimatum Game,<sup>1</sup> researchers found that negotiators offered more money to men than to women and were willing to accept offers for less money from men than from women (Solnick, 2001; Solnick & Schweitzer, 1999). As one researcher observed, ‘players seem to *expect* that women would be satisfied with a smaller share’ (Solnick, 2001, p. 199).

Ayres and Siegelman (1995) demonstrated a similar pattern of gender discrimination in negotiation offers in a field study of 153 new-car dealerships. The researchers matched confederate male and female, white and black buyers for appearance and trained them to use standardized bargaining scripts. Pairs of confederates were matched to negotiate separately for the same car at the same dealership within a couple of days of one another, such that one confederate was always a white male (total 306 negotiations). Results showed that car dealers systematically offered lower car prices to male than female and to white than black buyers.

In an Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiation simulation conducted with Jewish-Israeli university students, Maoz (2009) hypothesized that negotiators would be more receptive to peace proposals that came from female than male opponents because stereotypes suggest women are more willing to compromise than men are. As hypothesized, negotiators rated identical proposals more favorably when they came from female than male opponents. They also ascribed more warmth, less assertiveness, and somewhat more trustworthiness to female than male opponents.

Adding more nuance, Kray, Locke, and Van Zant (2012) studied how women's self-presentation as flirtatious or simply friendly would influence negotiators' offer behavior. They found that participants made less generous offers to women who appeared stereotypically warm and friendly than to those who appeared flirtatious. The findings of multiple studies suggested that feminine warmth is more of a liability than flirtatious charm because warmth signals a lack of competitiveness and concern for self. There were no comparable effects for men.

### *Misrepresentation*

Another implication of the agreeable feminine stereotype is that negotiators perceive the risks associated with lying to female negotiators to be lower than with male counterparts (Kray, 2012). Kray conducted an archival analysis of deception in a real-estate sale simulation used in a business school negotiation course over three semesters. In this particular simulation, it is advantageous for the buyer to mislead the seller about the intended use of the property. Kray found that buyers admitted lying to female sellers at a rate three times higher than to male sellers. Corroborating evidence of buyer lies revealed the same statistically significant pattern of gender discrimination but suggested that the students lied more frequently than they admitted in the self-reports. The gender effects were starkest in the case of outright lies about the intended use of the property following the sale.

### *Persistence*

Bowles and Flynn (2010) analyzed the implications of gender stereotypes for negotiation persistence in male, female, and mixed-gender pairs. They took a dyadic perspective to show that the strategic use of gender stereotypes not only concerns attributions made about negotiating counterparts (e.g., female = cooperative and therefore more yielding; male = competitive and therefore more obstinate) but also depends on the gender match or mismatch within the negotiating pair.

The strategic implications of being paired with a cooperatively typed (e.g., feminine-stereotyped) or competitively typed (e.g., masculine-stereotyped) negotiator differs if the negotiator is competitively or cooperatively typed him- or herself. For instance, cooperatively typed negotiators (e.g., women) may anticipate collaborative encounters with others they type as cooperative but potentially exploitative interactions with those they type as competitive. In contrast, competitively typed negotiators (e.g., men) gain less from discriminating between types because their type is likely to invite competitive behavior from both competitive and cooperative types (Kelley & Stahelski, 1970).

Bowles and Flynn (2010) ran two experiments in which participants interacted with nay-saying negotiation counterparts (i.e., parties who refused to budge). As predicted, women persisted more strongly in negotiations with male than female nay-sayers (i.e., more with competitively than cooperatively typed counterparts), whereas counterpart gender had no effect on men's persistence behavior. This research suggests that negotiators use gender stereotypes not only to judge their counterparts but also to infer what others are likely to expect of them, and that these stereotype-based inferences influence fundamental negotiation behaviors.

### *Constituent Representation*

A final illustration of the influence of gender stereotypes comes from research on the effects of constituent gender. Pruitt, Carnevale, Forcey, and Van Slyck (1986) tested the effects of negotiating on behalf of a male or female confederate and manipulated whether the confederate observed the agent negotiate on his or her behalf (or not). They found no significant gender differences in the agents' negotiating behavior. However, they found that agents used more contentious bargaining behavior and negotiated more inequitable agreements when being watched (versus not) by male constituents, and used more cooperative negotiating behavior and achieved more equitable outcomes when

being observed (versus not) by female constituents. As the researchers summarized, 'Stereotypes are a ready source of inferences about constituent expectations' (Pruitt et al., 1986, p. 271).

### ***Gender-Stereotype Fulfillment***

Research conducted on the premise that male and female negotiators would consistently live up to their gender stereotypes largely met with failure. However, in broad brushstrokes, we do observe weak patterns of women negotiating more cooperatively than men and of men competitively claiming a greater share of the negotiating pie than women. An important question in contemporary negotiation research has been how to explain when and why male and female negotiators are likely to fulfill gender stereotypes.

### ***Stereotype Threat***

Kray and colleagues (2001) demonstrated that one psychological mechanism underlying gender effects in negotiation is 'stereotype threat' (Steele, 1997; see Betz et al., Chapter 26 this volume). Actors experience performance-inhibiting stereotype threat when they are aware of negative stereotypes about their group's abilities in a personally important performance domain and feel that their performance in that domain is being evaluated. Negotiation is widely recognized as a critical management and business skill in which men have a stereotypic advantage over women.

Kray and colleagues (2001) investigated the potential for gender stereotype threat in negotiation by manipulating whether MBA students had the impression that faculty could evaluate their innate negotiating abilities. They assigned mixed-gender pairs of students to play buyers and sellers in a biotechnology plant acquisition. Participants were told either that the simulation was simply a learning tool (low threat) or that it was diagnostic of their actual negotiating abilities (high threat). As predicted, when the negotiators believed that their performance would be diagnostic of their negotiation abilities,

women (as compared to men) reported lower expectations of their negotiation performance and negotiated less favorable sales prices. When negotiators believed the simulation was not diagnostic, the gender effects diminished (see also Tellhed & Bjorklund, 2011).

### ***Stereotype Regeneration***

In subsequent studies, Kray and colleagues showed that they could manipulate associations between gender stereotypes and negotiation performance to produce effects that favored either men or women. For instance, Kray and colleagues (2002) identified verbal expressiveness, good listening, and emotional empathy as negotiation strengths associated more with women than men, and identified being well prepared, open minded, and good humored as gender-neutral negotiating strengths. MBA students participated in a negotiation that the researchers presented as diagnostic of 'important managerial negotiation abilities' and that the researchers then linked to either the stereotypically feminine or gender-neutral negotiating strengths, as described. When high performance was linked to stereotypically feminine attributes, the female MBA students entered the negotiation with higher expectations and negotiated more favorable outcomes than did their male peers. When performance was linked to more gender-neutral traits, the gender effects reverted back to the traditional gender stereotype: male (versus female) students had higher expectations and performance. Kray and colleagues (2002) also showed that linking gender stereotypic traits to poor negotiation performance produced gender-correspondent underperformance in both male and female negotiators. In sum, one explanation for gender stereotypic effects in negotiation is that gender-based performance expectations trigger 'self-fulfilling prophecies' (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978).

### ***Gender Stereotype Reactance***

Psychological reactance occurs when actors perceive others' expectations as negatively constraining and they protest by behaving



contrary to those expectations (Brehm, 1966). Researchers have demonstrated two conditions under which negotiators systematically defy gender stereotypic expectations in this way. One involves the experience of being explicitly negatively stereotyped, and the other involves heightened impression motivation.

### *Explicit Stereotyping*

As described above, Kray and colleagues (2001) showed that the subtle activation of gender stereotypes produces stereotype-consistent gender differences in negotiation performance. They also tested the effect of drawing an explicit connection between the negotiator's gender and their likely performance, hypothesizing that it would produce psychological reactance and counter-stereotypic negotiation performance. More specifically, they hypothesized that explicit stereotyping of female negotiators as inferior to male negotiators would motivate reactance in the female negotiators and reverse the gender stereotypic pattern of male dominance in negotiation performance.

In two studies, Kray and colleagues (2001) linked negotiation performance to gender stereotypic traits, specifically high performance to rationality and assertiveness and low performance to emotionality and passivity. The researchers then manipulated whether or not the negotiators were told that 'Because these personality characteristics tend to vary across gender, male and female students have been shown to differ in their performance on this task' (Kray et al., 2001, Studies 3 and 4). In both studies, exposure to the explicitly sex-discriminating message motivated female negotiators to increase their aspirations and improve their performance, ultimately reversing the male advantage in negotiation performance.

### *Impression Motivation*

Another potential mechanism of psychological reactance is impression motivation (i.e., concern that one's behavior will be perceived in a desirable way), because negatively stereotyped

groups feel motivated to deny negative attributions about their competencies (von Hippel et al., 2005). For instance, von Hippel and colleagues (von Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden, & Shochet, 2011) showed that women who experience stereotype threat about their leadership abilities adopt a more masculine communication style. This masculine style unfortunately backfires because it makes the woman less socially attractive and therefore less persuasive.

Curhan and Overbeck (2008) tested the effects of impression motivation in a candidate-recruiter job negotiation simulation. In a high impression-motivation condition, they told negotiators they would be rewarded or penalized based on their counterpart's impression of them. Students in the control condition received no impression-motivation information. Consistent with psychological-reactance theory, Curhan and Overbeck found that female negotiators in the recruiter role negotiated significantly more competitively (i.e., counter-stereotypically) in the impression-motivation condition than in the control condition. Interestingly, male negotiators did the inverse, negotiating more cooperatively under impression-motivation concerns. The results suggest that negotiators sometimes defy gender stereotypes when they anticipate that others will evaluate them in an unfavorable, gender stereotypic way.

While liberating in some respects, the strategy of playing counter to the stereotype has its limitations. Curhan and Overbeck (2008) found that male negotiators who acted more cooperatively to create a better impression ended up with lower negotiation payoffs. Female negotiators who acted tougher to create a better impression earned higher negotiation payoffs but ironically created more negative impressions with their counterparts.

### ***Gender Stereotype Policing and Conformity***

Gender stereotypes have both descriptive and prescriptive functions (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly, 1987). The descriptive

function informs how we anticipate men and women *will* behave or perform (e.g., ‘men are more competitive and, therefore, better negotiators than women’). As already discussed, negotiators use descriptive stereotypes to make attributions about counterparts and constituents, and descriptive stereotypes sometimes become self-fulfilling prophecies or targets of reactance for negotiators themselves. Prescriptive stereotypes relate to how we think men and women *should* act (e.g., ‘women should be selfless, not demanding’), and they inform what we think is appropriate negotiating behavior for men and women.

The application of prescriptive stereotypes gives rise to gender stereotype policing – the protection and maintenance of gender stereotypes by penalizing those who deviate from their prescriptions – and conformity – socially motivated adherence to gender-stereotypic behavioral prescriptions. Research shows that policing creates a social motivation for female negotiators, in particular, to adhere to gendered behavioral norms to the detriment of their economic interests.

### *Women’s Compensation Negotiation Dilemma*

Compensation negotiations are a domain in which there has been accumulating evidence of gender differences favoring men (Bowles & McGinn, 2008b). Some studies indicate that women are more reticent than men to negotiate for higher compensation (Small, Gelfand, Babcock, & Gettman, 2007). Others show that when negotiating pay, women (as compared to men) set lower aspirations, assert themselves less, and depart with poorer outcomes (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Barron, 2003; Bowles, Babcock, & McGinn, 2005; Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; Stevens, Bavetta, & Gist, 1993). A burning research question has been to explain why these gender stereotypic effects persist in such an economically important domain.

Research by Bowles and colleagues has shown that it is reasonable for women to be more reticent than men about negotiating for higher compensation because of the policing

of prescriptive gender stereotypes (Bowles & Babcock, 2009, 2013; Bowles, Babcock, & Lai, 2007). Compensation negotiations are more problematic for female than male negotiators because making claim to greater monetary rewards for oneself violates prescriptions of the feminine stereotype. The pursuit of higher compensation aligns with the masculine stereotype of the agentic, breadwinning man, but it contradicts normative expectations that the communal woman be more concerned for others than for herself (Wade, 2001).

In multiple studies, Bowles and colleagues recruited participants to evaluate managers based on either a transcript or a video of a job placement interview. The participants rated their impression of the candidates and their willingness to work with them. The researchers manipulated the manager’s gender and whether the manager negotiated for higher compensation. They found that evaluators were disinclined to work with female managers who negotiated for higher compensation (versus not) because they were perceived to be less nice, more demanding, and insufficiently concerned about organizational relationships. In contrast, negotiating had little effect on the evaluations of male managers (Bowles & Babcock, 2013; Bowles et al., 2007). This pattern of social resistance to female negotiators persisted even when the managers bargained for higher compensation on the basis of an outside offer, which is the most commonly advised explanation for negotiating for higher pay (Bowles & Babcock, 2009). In sum, women (more than men) face a dilemma in compensation negotiation, in which they have to weigh the social risks of negotiating against the potential economic benefits.

### *Negotiating for Self versus Other*

Gender stereotype policing and conformity also help to explain why women perform better in negotiations in which they are advocating for others as opposed to themselves. Bowles et al. (2005) showed that women negotiate significantly higher compensation

outcomes when advocating for others than for themselves. In two experimental studies, the women's negotiation outcomes when advocating for others rivaled, if not bested, the men's. Advocating for self versus other had no effects on the performance of male negotiators.

Amanatullah and Morris (2010) tested whether greater anticipated social backlash when negotiating for self (versus other) would explain this effect. They created a scripted compensation negotiation with a computerized confederate and manipulated whether negotiators were advocating for themselves or for someone else. Prior to the negotiation, participants indicated whether they anticipated backlash for appearing too demanding. The results showed that female negotiators advocating for themselves (versus for others) made more modest compensation requests and were less likely to select assertive negotiating scripts among an array of bargaining-language options. Anticipated backlash explained the female negotiators' more reticent behavior in the self- versus other-advocacy conditions. Once again, advocating for self versus other had no significant effects on the negotiating behavior of male negotiators. In sum, when advocating for others, women have more liberty to negotiate forcefully, and gender differences in performance decline.

### **Summary of Gender Stereotypes in Negotiation**

Gender stereotypes have four categories of influence in negotiations. Negotiators *use* them as strategic information about the types of offers they should make or how cooperatively or competitively they should behave. Negotiators *fulfill* gender stereotypes, particularly when gendered performance expectations are subtly introduced in contexts in which negotiators feel they are being evaluated. Negotiators *react* to gender stereotypes by behaving in counter-stereotypic ways when they feel constrained by negative gender-stereotypic expectations. Finally, negotiators

*police and conform* to gender stereotypes, such that women, in particular, become inhibited from asserting their self-interest or even coming to the bargaining table.

### **PREDICTING WHEN GENDER STEREOTYPES WILL INFLUENCE NEGOTIATION: AMBIGUITY AND GENDER TRIGGERS**

As illustrated in the previous section, the effects of gender stereotypes are sometimes contradictory. They wax, wane, and change direction across negotiation contexts, favoring men in many situations but women in others. As such, negotiation researchers face the challenge of understanding more deeply the role of situational factors in the manifestation of gender effects.

Two categories of situational factors help us to predict *when* gender is likely to influence negotiation. One is the *degree of ambiguity* within the negotiation context, which facilitates the emergence of gender effects. The other is the presence of *gender triggers*, which make gender relevant and salient within the negotiation context (Bowles et al., 2005). Table 28.1 presents a summary of propositions about how particular forms of gender triggers and increased ambiguity might combine to increase the likelihood of gender stereotype use, fulfillment, reactance, and policing and conformity.

#### **Ambiguity**

Increased ambiguity within the negotiation context facilitates gender effects by 'weakening' the psychological situation (Mischel, 1977). 'Strong' situations operate like traffic lights, providing the same clear signal to all participants. Weak situations, in contrast, require improvisation and thereby create more potential for individual differences. When a negotiation situation is ambiguous, parties must search the environment and their own mental schema for cues for how to enact the negotiation. How am I expected to behave?

**Table 28.1** Summary of propositions: When are gender stereotypes likely to influence negotiations?

When are gender stereotypes more influential?		
Influences of gender stereotypes	Gender triggers	Ambiguity
<b><i>Use as strategic information</i></b> <i>Proposition 1:</i> Negotiators are more likely to use gender stereotypes to make inferences about their counterparts' (or constituents') 'types' (e.g., competitive vs. cooperative) ...	(a) ... when gender stereotypes are implicitly activated (b) ... when negotiating roles align with or contradict gender roles (c) ... when power dynamics reinforce gender stereotypes (d) ... when there are more social cues of counterparts' (or constituents') gender	(e) ... the less familiar they are with counterparts' (or constituents') negotiating style, competences, or preferences (i.e., increased type ambiguity) (f) ... the less clarity they have about the zone of possible agreement and standards for agreement (i.e., increased structural ambiguity) (g) ... the less clarity they have about how they should behave (i.e., increased norm ambiguity)
<b><i>Stereotype fulfillment</i></b> <i>Proposition 2:</i> Negotiators are more likely to fulfill gender stereotypes ...	(a) ... when gender stereotypes are implicitly activated and negotiators feel they are being evaluated (b) ... when negotiating roles align with gender roles (c) ... when power dynamics reinforce gender stereotypes (d) ... when there are more social cues of the parties' gender	(e) ... the less familiar parties are with one another's negotiating style, competences, or preferences (i.e., increased type ambiguity) (f) ... the less clarity they have about the zone of possible agreement and standards for agreement (i.e., increased structural ambiguity) (g) ... the less clarity they have about how they should behave in the negotiation (i.e., increased norm ambiguity)
<b><i>Stereotype reactance</i></b> <i>Proposition 3:</i> Negotiators are more likely to resist gender stereotypes by self-presenting in counter-stereotypical ways ...	(a) ... when negotiators are confronted with explicit gender stereotypes (b) ... when negotiators have a strong impression motivation to contradict the stereotype (c) ... when there are more social cues of the parties' gender	(d) ... the less clarity they have about how they should behave in the negotiation (i.e., increased norm ambiguity)
<b><i>Stereotype policing and conformity</i></b> <i>Proposition 4:</i> Negotiators are more likely to police and conform to gender stereotypes ...	(a) ... when gender stereotypes are implicitly activated in the negotiation context (b) ... when negotiating roles conflict with gender roles (c) ... when power dynamics reinforce gender stereotypes (d) ... when there are more social cues of the parties' gender	(e) ... the less clarity they have about how targets of evaluation should behave in the negotiation (i.e., increased norm ambiguity)

What should my opening offer be? What are the appropriate standards for agreement? When searching for answers, gendered norms and stereotypes become a source of information about what to expect from others and from oneself.

Negotiation researchers have identified two types of ambiguity that facilitate gender

effects: *structural ambiguity* about the substance of a negotiation (Bowles et al., 2005) and *norm ambiguity* about standards of behavior (Kray & Gelfand, 2009). I also propose a third category, *type ambiguity*, which relates to how well negotiators and their counterparts or constituents know one another.

### *Structural Ambiguity*

Structural ambiguity relates to the degree of clarity negotiators have about the 'zone of possible agreement' (Lax & Sebenius, 1986) – in other words, the issues to be resolved and the options available for resolving them – and appropriate standards for agreement. Increased structural ambiguity makes it less clear to negotiators what can be negotiated and what constitutes a good outcome, opening the door for gendered norms to answer these questions. Employing both archival data on MBA students' job-market outcomes and laboratory-based negotiation experiments, Bowles et al. (2005) examined whether increased structural ambiguity would produce more gender stereotypic negotiation outcomes.

In a study of the salary outcomes of graduating MBA students, Bowles et al. (2005) found a \$5,000 gender gap favoring men after controlling for more than 30 salary predictors (e.g., work experience, pre-MBA salary, dual-career concerns, etc.). We then asked career-services professionals to rate the ambiguity of salary standards in the industries in which the MBA students accepted positions. In industries that were judged to have clearer salary standards (low ambiguity) – which was 70% of sample – there were no significant gender differences in the salary offers accepted by graduating MBA students. In contrast, in industries with ambiguous salary standards, female MBA students accepted salaries that were 10% lower than did their male peers. Importantly, there was as much variation in the salary outcomes in low- as in high-ambiguity industries, but gender only explained the variance in the high-ambiguity industries.

Bowles and colleagues (2005) complemented these suggestive archival results with laboratory studies in which they manipulated structural ambiguity. Under high ambiguity (i.e., no clear agreement standards), there were significant gender effects on negotiation performance. Under low ambiguity (i.e., clear agreement standards), there were no significant gender effects. Again, structural ambiguity had no effect on the variance in

outcomes; it only affected whether gender predicted negotiation performance.

### *Norm Ambiguity*

Norm ambiguity relates to the degree of clarity about what constitutes appropriate negotiating behavior. Kray and Gelfand (2009) examined whether increased norm ambiguity would produce more gender-stereotypic reactions to a compensation negotiation. They randomly assigned MBA students to respond to a scenario in which their first compensation request was either immediately accepted by the employer or in which there were several rounds of exchange of concessions before a compensation agreement was reached. Previous research suggested that the MBA students would feel less satisfied about the negotiation when their first offer was immediately accepted because a quick agreement would suggest they could have asked for more (Galinsky, Seiden, Kim, & Medvec, 2002). However, Kray and Gelfand hypothesized that, if it were unclear whether negotiating was socially appropriate (high norm ambiguity), having a first offer accepted would disappoint women less than men because prescriptive gender stereotypes make compensation negotiations more socially awkward for women than men (Bowles et al., 2007). In other words, the women would experience 'relief versus regret' when negotiating norms were unclear.

Kray and Gelfand (2009) manipulated norm ambiguity by providing or withholding information that negotiating for higher compensation was expected and tended to be viewed positively by employers as a critical business skill. Under low ambiguity (i.e., negotiating is normative), both male and female MBA students expressed more regret when their first offer was accepted as compared to when there was an exchange of concessions. Under high norm ambiguity, only male MBAs expressed more regret when their first offer was accepted.

It may have been particularly important to the effectiveness of Kray and Gelfand's (2009) low-ambiguity condition that they



described the propensity to negotiate as a behavior that would be viewed positively. Small and colleagues (2007) tried to reduce ambiguity and gender differences favoring men in the propensity to negotiate by explicitly instructing study participants that they could negotiate for higher compensation for their participation. This information that 'negotiation' was an option only increased gender differences in the propensity to negotiate. In contrast, when they told participants they could 'ask' for higher compensation, gender differences diminished. Small and colleagues argued that 'asking' fits better than 'negotiating' with normative expectations for low-power behavior and is therefore less problematic for women.

### *Type Ambiguity*

I use the term 'type ambiguity' to refer to a lack of clarity about the negotiating style, competences, or preferences of counterparts or constituents. To the best of my knowledge, no research has tested whether gender stereotypes are more influential when negotiating counterparts' or constituents' types are less well understood. However, it seems reasonable to posit that increased type ambiguity would heighten the potential influence of gender stereotypes, for at least three reasons. First, negotiators are more likely to try to discern information from their counterparts' or constituents' gender when these parties are unknown to them. This is not to say that gender could not influence existing relationships or reputations, but rather that negotiators are less likely to individuate and more likely to use stereotypes when assessing less well-known others. Second, when negotiators believe that their own type is unknown to the other party, they may be more likely to anticipate that gender will influence others' expectations of their behavior (e.g., 'They probably think I'll be nice because I am a woman'). Third, research suggests that men and women are more likely to fall into gender-stereotypic interactions when their relative competencies for or potential contributions to group work are unknown (e.g., Wood & Karten, 1986). Gender stereotypic behavior seems

more likely the less parties understand about their respective negotiation or substantive expertise.

### *Gender Triggers*

There are four categories of situational factors known to moderate the salience and relevance of gender in negotiation. The first of these gender triggers is *stereotype activation*, the manner in which stereotypes are introduced in the negotiation context. The second is *role congruence*, the alignment of negotiating roles with gender stereotypic behavioral expectations (i.e., gender roles, Eagly, 1987). The third is negotiators' psychological experience of *power* within the role and in the dyad, which can weaken or reinforce the gender status hierarchy. The fourth is the salience of *social cues* about negotiators' gender identities.

### *Stereotype Activation*

As elaborated above in the discussions of stereotype fulfillment and reactance, the influence of descriptive gender stereotypes on negotiation expectations and performance depends on whether the stereotype is subtly activated or explicitly named (Kray et al., 2001). Negotiators are more likely to fulfill gender stereotypes when they hang 'in the air' (Steele, 1997) in such a way that negotiators are aware of the stereotypes and their relevance to their own performance but are not directly confronted with them. This type of 'implicit' gender stereotyping is more virulent when negotiators feel they are being evaluated. In contrast, when gender stereotypes are explicitly linked to negotiation performance, negotiators are likely to react against them by negotiating in counter-stereotypical ways.

To the best of my knowledge, negotiation researchers have not tested directly how the activation of gender stereotypes influences either the use of gender stereotypes as strategic information or the policing and conformity to gender stereotypes. However, as proposed in Table 28.1, I hypothesize that subtle activation

of gender stereotypes would heighten the potential for these two phenomena. The use of stereotypes as strategic information seems more likely if negotiators are primed to make gender stereotypic associations; indeed, that might help to explain why stereotype threat effects on negotiation performance are stronger in mixed-gender than same-gender pairs (Kray et al., 2001). Likewise, the policing of gender stereotypes may be more pronounced if negotiators are more attuned to normative expectations for male and female negotiators.

### *Role Congruence*

Another potential trigger of gender effects in negotiation is the degree to which the negotiator's role corresponds with or contradicts the expectations of their gender role (Stuhlmacher & Linnabery, in press). This correspondence or contradiction contributes to gender differences in at least two ways. First, role incongruence could inhibit negotiators because a counter-stereotypic negotiating role is socially risky. For instance, self-advocating in a compensation negotiation is gender-role congruent for men but gender-role incongruent for women. Therefore, women tend to be penalized more than men for self-advocating for higher pay (Bowles et al., 2007). In contrast, advocating for someone else in a compensation negotiation is role-congruent for both genders – for women as caregivers and men as chivalrous protectors (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Bowles et al., 2005).

Second, negotiators may feel less confident about negotiating roles that have a perceived 'lack of fit' with their gender (Heilman, 1983). Bear (2011) showed that negotiators tend to avoid negotiations that contradict their gender role. Bear and Babcock (2012) demonstrated that they could eliminate the male performance advantage in a competitive bargaining simulation by changing the topic of the negotiation from the sale of motorcycle parts (masculine stereotyped) to beads (feminine stereotyped). Male negotiators bested their female counterparts when negotiating the sale of motorcycle parts, but there were no gender differences in performance when beads were at stake. Miles

and Lasalle (2008) similarly found that men's and women's perceived self-efficacy in negotiation was more positively predictive of their outcomes when they were negotiating over gender-congruent topics (i.e., hiring a babysitter for women versus hiring an alligator wrestler for men).

### *Power Dynamics*

Gender stereotypes are intimately related to men's and women's power and status in society (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Glick & Fiske, 2001; Ridgeway, 2011). The feminine stereotype corresponds with the expectations of low-power behavior (e.g., other-oriented, agreeable, deferential), whereas the masculine stereotype corresponds with expectations for high-power behavior (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996). Lower-status actors are expected to be concerned about others because doing so makes them seem more useful and less threatening to the social order (Jackman, 1994; Ridgeway, 1982).

Situational dynamics that increase women's power relative to men in negotiation are likely to decrease gender-stereotypic effects favoring men (for theoretical discussions, see Karakowsky & Miller, 2006; Miles & Clenney, 2010). For example, research on gender and the propensity to initiate negotiations found that the psychological experience of high (versus low) power made women feel less intimidated (Small et al., 2007) and more inclined to step up and negotiate (Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007). Men's propensity to negotiate was not responsive to power manipulations, perhaps because they experience chronically higher power than women in negotiation situations (Magee et al., 2007; Small et al., 2007).

### *Social Cues*

People commonly discern others' gender by their physical appearance, the timbre of their voice, and other social cues, such as a gender stereotypical name. The more social cues a situation provides (e.g., face-to-face meetings provide more than the telephone, which provides more than written communication),

the more potential there is for a speaker's gender to become an interpretative or evaluative frame in communication (Chaiken & Eagly, 1983). As discussed already, meta-analytic research on gender in negotiation indicates that stereotypic effects on behavior and performance are more likely to arise when there is more communication potential between parties (Stuhlmacher, Citera, & Willis, 2007; Walters, et al., 1998).

Stuhlmacher and colleagues (2007) found that female negotiators were significantly less aggressive in face-to-face than in virtual (e.g., email) negotiations. This could be because face-to-face interactions heighten gender-stereotypic expectations that women even more than men will be concerned about departing the negotiation with a good relationship (Gelfand, Majoy, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006). It could also be because women experience a heightened self-consciousness about the policing of prescriptive stereotypes, as described earlier, in face-to-face than in more socially distant contexts.

### ***Ambiguity and Gender Triggers in Interaction***

Ambiguity and gender triggers work in interaction, such that gender triggers are more influential with more ambiguity. Bowles et al. (2005) demonstrated the interactive effects of ambiguity and gender triggers by manipulating structural ambiguity and role congruence (i.e., negotiating for self versus other in a compensation negotiation). Under higher ambiguity, advocacy role had a significantly greater effect on women than men. Women negotiated significantly better outcomes when advocating for others than for themselves; there was no advocacy effect for men. Under low ambiguity, advocacy role had no effect for men or women, apparently because women were less concerned about role incongruence when they had clear negotiating instructions. The flow of the propositions in Table 28.1 illustrates further the potentially interactive effects of gender triggers and ambiguity on negotiation behavior.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Taking inspiration from developments in social psychological research on gender in social behavior, the negotiation field has made enormous strides in understanding the role of gender in negotiation behavior and outcomes. An important practical implication of this progress has been the insights gained into how negotiation processes function as micro-mechanisms of gender inequality in organizations (for a review, see Bowles & McGinn, 2008b). Recognizing that negotiation is an instrumental social process in the construction and reinforcement of gender inequality, negotiation scholars have become increasingly concerned with generating strategies to close gender gaps in negotiated outcomes. This prescriptive vein of research remains in its infancy, but a number of clear propositions have emerged.

### ***Strategies for Women***

#### ***Reduce Ambiguity***

One clear implication of the research on ambiguity is that women are likely to benefit from the establishment of clear standards for agreement and norms of acceptable behavior. However, Bowles and McGinn (2008a) caution about gender bias in the information search itself, particularly in contexts with a pattern of differential outcomes for men and women (e.g., compensation). There is a general tendency for women to compare themselves to other women and for men to compare themselves to other men (Crosby, 1984; Major & Forcey, 1985; Shah, 1998). This tendency is reinforced by the gendered structure of social networks, in which women tend to be more closely connected with women than men, and vice versa (Ibarra, 1993). Therefore, in negotiation contexts with a pattern of outcomes favoring men over women, reducing ambiguity in itself (e.g., establishing standards for agreement) will not be beneficial to women relative to men unless women collect information representative of men's as well as women's experiences. Performance differences are likely

to be reduced when men and women negotiate from comparable standards, but not if they draw from gendered points of reference.

### *Raise Awareness about Stereotypes*

Research suggests that simply educating women about stereotypes can help them combat some of the pernicious effects of stereotypes. Johns, Schmader, and Martens (2005) tested the effectiveness of educating women about stereotype threat in a mathematics-performance study. The stereotype that men are better at math than women is widely held and easily activated. Researchers presented men and women with difficult math problems and manipulated whether they perceived they were being evaluated. As described earlier, stereotype-threat effects tend to emerge when stereotypes are implicitly activated and participants feel they are being evaluated. In a third condition, the researchers added an explanation of the detrimental effects of stereotype threat on women's math performance. The first two conditions produced the traditional pattern of stereotype threat, in which women perform less well than men when they believe they are being evaluated. Yet, in the third condition, the evaluation manipulation had no effect on women's math performance relative to men's because the women were warned about stereotype threat.

Taking inspiration from Johns and colleagues (2005), Kray (2007) proposed that one strategy for female negotiators to resist fulfilling negative gender stereotypes is to raise their awareness of the potential for stereotype threat. Drawing on her own research on stereotype regeneration (Kray et al., 2002), Kray (2007) also suggested that women might combat negative gender stereotypes in negotiation by contemplating stereotypic advantages of their gender (e.g., good listening and verbal skills) or by tapping other positively stereotyped identities (e.g., MBA or other professional identities; see also Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999).

### *Use Knowledge about Stereotypes*

Female negotiators could also use their knowledge of prescriptive gender stereotypes

to craft strategies that enhance their persuasiveness and avoid the risks of social backlash (see Kulik & Olekalns, 2012; Tinsley, Cheldelin, Schneider, & Amanatullah, 2009). Women benefit even more than men from adjusting their negotiating style to the social situation. For instance, Flynn and Ames (2006) found that increased propensity for self-monitoring (i.e., attending and adapting to one's social environment; Snyder, 1974) produced significant performance advantages for female but not for male negotiators. In the Bowles and Flynn (2010) persistence studies described earlier, it was primarily the higher-performing female negotiators who adjusted their style of persistence to the gender of their negotiating counterpart.

Searching for answers to women's compensation negotiation dilemma, Bowles and Babcock (2013) tested the differential effects of varied negotiation scripts on men's and women's social outcomes (i.e., evaluators' willingness to work with them after negotiating) and negotiation outcomes (i.e., evaluators' willingness to grant their requests). Varying the negotiation scripts had no effects on men's social or negotiation outcomes, but it did affect women's. They found that conforming to gender stereotypes – for instance, by emphasizing the importance of their organizational relationships – improved women's social outcomes, but it did not enhance evaluators' willingness to grant their requests. Drawing on the literature and advice from negotiation faculty, practitioners, and executive coaches, they devised an alternative strategy for improving women's social and negotiation outcomes, called 'relational accounts.'

Relational accounts are explanations for why negotiation requests are legitimate that also demonstrate concern for organizational relationships (Bowles & Babcock, 2013). One example is for a woman to present her propensity to negotiate as an asset she brings to her work. This makes her propensity to negotiate seem more legitimate and enables her to present herself as a team player. Bowles and Babcock emphasize that the principles underlying relational accounts – demonstrating the

legitimacy of the request and concern for organizational relationships – are more important than the specific language they tested. In other words, women should devise relational accounts that are authentic and fit their negotiation situation.

### *Open Research Questions*

One important unanswered question is the extent to which research and prescriptive advice on gender in negotiation apply to all groups of women. The overwhelming majority of participants and targets of evaluation in research on gender in negotiation have been white college-educated Americans. It remains an open question how women's multiple identities play out in negotiation and whether other status-linked social identities might moderate established effects (Kolb, 2012). For instance, there is emerging evidence that gender-based social backlash effects documented with white targets of evaluation are reversed when the targets are black, suggesting that black women have more freedom than white women or black men to assert their dominance in work situations (Livingston, Rosette, & Washington, 2012). There is also strong evidence that maternal status alters women's compensation and career potential (Budig & England, 2001; Correll, Benard, & Paik, 2007), yet there is little empirical research on how maternal status affects women's career-related negotiations (Bowles & McGinn, 2008b; Kolb, 2012). Researchers on gender in negotiation should stretch the field's theoretical boundaries by examining how intersecting social identities influence established gender effects.

### *Strategies for Organizations*

Negotiation scholars recognize that the onus for correcting the distortionary effects of gender stereotypes in negotiation should not be placed solely on women, yet little scholarly attention has been paid to strategies for organizations (Kolb, 2009, 2012). Indeed, because psychological research methods (e.g., laboratory studies, survey experiments)

predominate in negotiation, most research on gender in negotiation is virtually freestanding of organizational context. There are, however, some important implications of existing research for organizations, as well as wide-open opportunities for researchers to investigate organizational characteristics as facilitators or mitigators of gender effects in negotiation (Bowles & McGinn, 2008b).

### *Reduce Ambiguity*

One strategy for organizations that flows from existing research on gender in negotiation is to reduce ambiguity by making more transparent what career opportunities, resources, or rewards are negotiable and what the standards are for attaining them (see also Fuegen & Biernat, Chapter 9 this volume). Borrowing from Rousseau's (2005) work on 'i-deals' (i.e., idiosyncratic employment arrangements), Kulik and Olekalns (2012) have suggested that organizations create 'zones of negotiability' that specify what terms of employment are open to discussion and reformulation (e.g., schedule, training, etc.). Providing greater transparency about what is negotiable and about organizational standards for agreement is likely to reduce the influence of gender stereotypes on negotiation outcomes. Helping women identify as well as men can, what opportunities are available could reduce the gender biases in pre-negotiation information flows that stem from gendered social networks (Belliveau, 2005; Ibarra, 1993). A diagnostic question for organizational leaders is how do employees learn what is negotiable – through transparent systems or informal relationships?

### *Raise Awareness of and Address Gender Stereotypes*

Organizations have a role to play in educating employees about implicit gender stereotypes, to help arm them against phenomena, such as stereotype threat, and to raise evaluators' self-awareness of their influences (Kray & Shirako, 2011). In the United States, gender stereotypes are more likely to be embedded in taken-for-granted work



practices and behavioral patterns than manifest in explicit forms of gender discrimination (Kolb, 2009; Sturm, 2001). Diagnostic questions for organizational leaders include: To what extent might employees' career-related negotiations be influenced by the historically gendered distribution of resources, opportunities, and rewards within the organization? Do men and women feel equally at liberty to self-advocate without backlash in career-related negotiations? Can employees negotiate to find creative solutions to work–family conflicts without fear of undermining their perceived value within the organization?

### *Open Research Questions*

There is a real need to better understand how organizational culture and context moderate gender effects in negotiation. For instance, while a number of careful studies indicate that women are less inclined than men to negotiate for career rewards, such as compensation (Babcock, Gelfand, Small, & Stayn, 2006; Greig, 2008; Small et al., 2007), the results of other survey studies suggest that such effects are more pronounced in some organizational contexts than in others (e.g., Crothers et al., 2010; Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; O'Shea & Bush, 2002; Schneider, Tinsley, Cheldelin, & Amanatullah, 2010). Yet, we have little insight into what systematic contextual factors, other than ambiguity, might account for this variation.

Psychological research suggests a number of factors that might help to explain variation in male and female negotiators' experiences across organizational contexts; for instance, more gender-stereotyped occupations or organizational contexts could heighten the potential for role incongruence. Rudman and Glick (1999) found greater backlash toward self-promoting women in more feminized occupations. Heilman (1980) found that decreasing the proportion of women in an applicant pool produced more negative evaluations of female candidates. Similarly, Eagly, Makhijani, and Klonsky (1992) found that female leaders were evaluated more

negatively when they stepped into historically male-dominated leadership roles. Psychological research enlightening gender triggers embedded in organizational structures, cultures, and practices would make important practical and theoretical contributions to the negotiation field.

## **CONCLUSION**

Psychological research on gender in negotiation has progressed dramatically in the past 25 years, from the application of ill-fitting personality theories to a deeper understanding of the effects of gender stereotypes in context. Perhaps the greatest contribution thus far has been the illumination of negotiation as a micro-mechanism of gender inequality in organizations, widening the gender gaps in pay and authority. Yet, following in the best traditions of negotiation research, we should not stop at the point of explaining how gender stereotypes hinder negotiation performance. Rather, we should continue on the next step of devising research-based prescriptive suggestions for untying the knotty problems we have uncovered.

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## **NOTE**

- 1 The Ultimatum Game is an exercise that models the last round of a negotiation. Party 1 makes an offer to Party 2 for how to divide a resource (e.g., 10 dollars). Party 2 then decides whether to accept the offer. If Party 2 accepts the offer, the agreement stands. If Party 2 rejects the offer, neither party gets any of the resource.

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# Affirmative Action and Gender Equality

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## INTRODUCTION

Positive action policies, also known as affirmative action policies, are important tools for creating gender equality in the United States as well as in other countries. The central aim of the present chapter is to describe how affirmative action operates in promoting equal opportunity and gender inclusion. In the first part of the chapter we describe the policy and practice of affirmative action and in the second we will document the effectiveness of affirmative action in assuring gender equality. In the third section attitudes toward affirmative action in the United States are examined, with an eye toward highlighting research that has appeared since the last major reviews (Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006; Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006). In this section, we also speculate about the reasons for the puzzling lack of support for affirmative action among people who claim to endorse gender equity, particularly given that it has been very effective in achieving its stated goal. We conclude with a brief overview of implications for policy and practice.

This chapter will focus almost exclusively on affirmative action in the United States. Although

researchers have begun to look at how affirmative action operates in countries around the world (Ainsworth, Knox, & O'Flynn, 2010; Cho, Kwon, & Ahn, 2010; Moses, 2010), most of the research on the effectiveness of affirmative action and on attitudes toward affirmative action has been conducted in the United States. In the first part of our chapter, we describe briefly how affirmative action policies operate in two other nations – Norway and Japan – primarily as a means of situating the American policy and practices and also as a way to encourage future research in different cultural contexts. Understanding how positive action policies operate in other countries, as well as how national and cultural norms and attitudes might vary, can provide important insights on how most effectively to implement programs and policies to increase gender equity.

## POLICY AND PRACTICE OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

### *General Background*

Although the concept of affirmative action comprises different policies and practices



(Crosby, 2004; Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006; Libertella, Sora, & Natale, 2007), in general, affirmative action can be defined as ‘a set of practices undertaken by employers, university admissions offices, and government agencies to go beyond non-discrimination, with the goal of actively improving the economic status of minorities and women with regard to employment, education, and business ownership and growth’ (Holzer & Neumark, 2006, p. 2).

Organizations that are affirmative action employers make a point of assuring that people in different groups (e.g., women and men; people of different race and ethnic backgrounds) have access to the same opportunities within their workplace. Schools that practice affirmative action go out of their way to make sure that people from different backgrounds have equal access to education. Regulations often focus on achieving particular goals that increase the access of a diverse pool of applicants to jobs and education (Walesby, 2010). In sum, affirmative action aims to eliminate or at least reduce discrimination by increasing opportunities for members of groups that are typically underrepresented in those contexts (Aberson & Haag, 2003; Mor Barak, 2011).

One way in which affirmative action differs from other, simpler forms of non-discrimination is that it uses outcomes as a measure of opportunities. With affirmative action ‘the proof is in the pudding’; belief in the claim of equal opportunities rests ultimately on a demonstration of equal achievements. Monitoring the effects of one’s policies and practices is at the core of affirmative action. Although the attention to outcomes assures organizations that they have instituted real equality of opportunity, such attention makes it easy for the general public to imagine incorrectly that affirmative action differs from equal opportunity and that the former looks at outcomes while the latter looks at opportunities. In fact, affirmative action, like every other non-discrimination policy, centers on equality of opportunity.

Yet, affirmative action policies challenge some of the assumptions that underlie simple non-discrimination policies (Crosby, 1994).

People tend to link the idea of ‘equal opportunity’ with the assumption that inequalities are deliberate and based on individuals’ prejudice, while underestimating the ways in which systems can privilege some people over others (see also Adams, Biernat, Branscombe, Crandall, & Wrightsman, 2008). Affirmative action employers scrutinize current practices with an eye to finding those factors that – often inadvertently – interfere with true equality. Administrators who endorse affirmative action policies know that they must consciously engineer situations to produce the desired outcome of true equality. Endorsers of affirmative action know that good intentions rarely suffice to create true equality, especially when longstanding systems favor one gender group over the other.

A couple of examples may suffice to illustrate how inequalities can occur without conscious intent to disadvantage women. For example, countries where schools customarily end at lunch, such as Germany, inadvertently make it more difficult for women to have full-time employment – given that mothers are more likely than fathers to be responsible for childcare (Bennhold, 2010; Treas & Drobic, 2010). Conversely, the Norwegian policy that promotes parental leave for fathers is meant to benefit men, but it also benefits women by allowing the option of a more fair gender division of labor within the family.

Another more complicated example of unintended imbalances was cited by Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, and Downing (2003). In a nutshell, the situation concerned women aviators who had campaigned to be allowed to fly large, expensive combat jets. The military resisted on the grounds that women recover consciousness more slowly than men, and when a plane is spiraling down toward the grounds, milliseconds can matter. The military’s assertion was based on data collected from women and men who had been spun around centrifugal force machines, wearing G-suits. What was not immediately apparent was that the data were deeply flawed. The G-suits worn by the women in the tests had

been made originally for men without any regard to differences in the anatomy between women and men. Women and men differ in the proportion of total height accounted for by legs (longer in women; shorter in men). The suits did not fit the relatively longer-legged women as well as the men. Once the women were fitted with G-suits that specifically conformed to their bodies, the gender difference in latency to recovery of consciousness disappeared.

Well-intentioned people relying on simple non-discrimination policies can be led to believe that persistent gender differences in achievements or outcomes result solely from gender differences in personalities, preparation, or capabilities (Adams et al., 2008). Sexist preconceptions result in the legitimization of differences and also, as the example above makes clear, make it hard for individuals to perceive or to analyze why differences in outcomes exist. With a more systems-oriented approach, those who embrace affirmative action practices are better positioned than most to ferret out the problematic causes of imbalances (e.g., sending children home at lunchtime; giving ill-fitting G-suits to women). Identifying the causes of problems is, of course, a good first step in their elimination.

### ***The Policy and Practice of Affirmative Action in the United States***

Affirmative action came into prominence in the United States in the 1960s as a means of redressing past and present discrimination against ethnic minority groups and against women. Affirmative action has been used to open up the channels to higher education. It has also found expression in the economy, occasionally through set-asides (in which some money is 'set aside' for specific types of enterprises such as women-owned companies) or other procurement practices and often through specialized employment practices.

Currently, affirmative action policies in US *educational* institutions concentrate on

correcting ethnic or racial imbalances. Girls and women of color benefit from such programs mostly as a function of their ethnicity and not as a function of their gender. Given the present chapter's focus on gender, we do not analyze the situation in the United States concerning affirmative action in education, but instead concentrate almost entirely on economic programs. Readers with an interest in affirmative action in education may consult other reviews (e.g., Fischer & Massey, 2007; Grodsky & Kalogrides, 2008; Lipson, 2007; Massey & Mooney, 2007; Tropp, Smith, & Crosby, 2007).

Affirmative action practices in *employment* concern both women and people of color. In the United States, affirmative action practices derive in very large measure from President Lyndon Johnson's Executive Order 11246. Promulgated in 1965, Executive Order 11246 stipulates that any organization with 50 employees or more that functions as a contractor to the federal government and has more than \$50,000 in federal business must be an affirmative action employer. Thus, although all businesses in the United States must avoid employment discrimination based on gender (and can be sued for transgressions), only businesses that are federal contractors *must* practice affirmative action.

What must an organization do to function as a legitimate affirmative action employer? Affirmative action employers are required to monitor personnel files and procedures to make sure they are equitable. Specifically, they must make sure that individuals who belong to the targeted groups (e.g., women, African Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans) are employed in all job classifications in proportion to their availability within those classifications.

When the organization discovers a discrepancy between the percentages who are qualified for jobs and the percentages who actually occupy those jobs, the organization must specify how it intends to correct the imbalances (Crosby et al., 2006; Sabattini & Crosby, 2008). Furthermore, in the United

States, affirmative action policies require that employers consider workers' demographics *in addition to* – not instead of – other qualifications (Schmukler, Rasquiza, Dimmit, & Crosby, 2010). Despite common misperceptions about affirmative action, decisions based on gender quotas do not comply with the policy. In fact, institutions that are found to consider gender instead of qualifications may be sued for sex discrimination; federal contractors who fail to rectify documented imbalances or who otherwise flaunt their obligations can be barred from keeping or obtaining federal contracts.

### ***The Policy and Practice of Affirmative Action in other Countries***

The United States is not the only country to have instituted affirmative action for women. Similar efforts include the Employment Equity Act of 1996 in Canada, an employment equity measure, and 'positive action' measures in Europe (International Labour Conference, 2003). Australia is also developing policies that specifically target women and seek to promote gender equity (Boeckmann & Feather, 2007), with the recent addition of gender to reporting requirements for publicly listed companies (EOWA, 2011; Minister for the Status of Women, 2011).

One country that has received a lot of attention lately for its positive action efforts towards increasing gender representation is Norway. As with other Scandinavian countries, Norway is at the forefront of gender equality in many areas of public life (United Nations Development Program, 2011). Yet, men continue to dominate the highest economic and political decision-making posts in the country, with men's representation ranging from 63% in the political arena to 96% among top business leaders (Teigen, 2008, p.1). To address the unequal representation in these areas, a number of new policies have been implemented in Norway.

Norwegian affirmative action policies can be divided into three types (Teigen,

2008). The first type, which translates as 'preferential treatment' (Teigen, 2008, p. 3), concerns public sector jobs. Specifically, for jobs where there is a gender imbalance, applicants of the underrepresented gender are given priority, when qualifications are equal. An analogous approach in the United States is 'tie-breaking', that is, factoring group membership into decision-making when all else is equal (Haley & Sidanius, 2006, p. 659; see also Kravitz et al., 2008). The second type, 'promotional' policies, incorporate practices such as 'additional point' systems or 'earmarking' to balance the gender composition. This policy has mostly been applied in academic environments to increase the representation of women within gender-skewed fields and in academic positions. Earmarking – that is, the practice of designating funds or resources specifically targeted to increase gender equality – has played an important role in Norwegian universities since the 1990s. The third type of policy has been called 'minimum representation' (Teigen, 2008), analogous to what Americans refer to as 'quotas'. The Norwegian legislature passed the first legislation in the world requiring substantial representation of women on corporate boards. Starting in 2004, the boards of all publicly-owned enterprises were required to have 40% women on them; two years later, the same rule was implemented in large joint-stock corporations in the private sector. The law has led to major change in terms of Norway's corporate board composition (Storvik, 2011).

Norwegian positive action policies also recognize that gender equity in the workplace is linked to gender equity within families. Norway's parental leave policy includes an important form of 'minimum representation' to facilitate gender equality among parents and guarantee access to parental leave for fathers. The so-called 'father quota' requires that at least four of the 10 weeks of paid parental leave be reserved for fathers (Brandth & Kvande, 2011).

## **The Policy and Practice of Affirmative Action in Japan**

As is the case in other regions, affirmative action policies in Asia assume a variety of shapes to respond to the needs and challenges specific to different cultural contexts. For example, in Malaysia, affirmative action policies are used as mechanisms for managing multiculturalism and cross-cultural conflict in the workplace and, historically, were put in place to benefit the numerical majority gaining access to opportunities (Montesino, 2011). In Korea, affirmative action measures were recently introduced (2006) among both private and public companies as a way of targeting long-standing discriminatory practices against women, and to specifically address the low employment ratio of Korean women compared to other OECD countries (Jung, Sung, & Kim, 2012).

In Japan, the concept of affirmative action originally appeared in the law books in 1997. Article 9 of the Equal Employment Opportunity Law of 1997 encouraged employers to take voluntary affirmative action, and Article 20 of the EEO Law stipulated that the State will provide consultation services and other assistance to those employers who are taking or seek to take affirmative action. In 1999, the Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society was enacted, and the term *sekkyokuteki kaizen-sochi* – which translates literally as ‘active improvement measure’ – came into being. *Sekkyokuteki kaizen-sochi* was defined in Article 2(2) of the Law as ‘measures to affirmatively provide opportunities to a necessary extent to persons of either sex in order to reduce and abolish disparities between men and women’. Article 8 of the Law stated that ‘the State is responsible for working out and implementing programs including taking *sekkyokuteki kaizen-sochi* which are conducive to the creation of a gender-equal society.’

After the enactment of the Basic Law, a number of programs were initiated in the Japanese public sector. Many local governments have enacted ordinances and undertaken

projects that are designed to help promote a gender-equal society. The Miyagi Prefecture has been recognized for its efforts. In 2004 the Miyagi Prefecture launched ‘The Positive Action Promotion Project’ (*Suishin Jigyo*). The prefecture gave credit to those companies taking affirmative action for women, so that the companies could have a better chance of securing procurement and construction and construction-related jobs with the prefectural government. Some of the government’s efforts have been successful. For instance, the national government set a goal in 2004 to hire more women who pass the exam that qualifies people to occupy high-level civil service jobs. They aimed to have 30% of the high-level civil servants to be women. By 2008 they had achieved the goal.

Some efforts, however, have been less successful. The Japan Association for National Universities set a goal to hire more female professors, so that the male–female ratio of professors at national universities would become 4 to 1 by 2010. But by the target year, less than 12% of professors at national universities were women.

In Japan, affirmative action – like so much else – is generally more a matter of the carrot than the stick. Although the laws encourage corporations to take affirmative steps to promote gender equity, there are no sanctions for corporations that fail to take the steps. Aside from a few instances such as the Miyagi Prefecture’s bold incentive plan, social approval appears to be more important than actual rewards. Persuasive messages often stress how much society in general (and thus men) will benefit from certain changes.

Typical of the soft approach is the brochure entitled ‘Do! Positive Action: Toward an Egalitarian Workplace for Men and Women’, issued by the Equal Employment, Children and Families Bureau and Regional Bureau of Labor of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. According to the brochure, affirmative (positive) action can be broken down into the following two components: measures taken solely for women or

preferring women over men, and measures taken for both men and women. The latter includes such measures as maintenance of a comfortable work environment and development and improvement of family-friendly policies. Whether such a soft approach can lead to substantial change remains to be seen.

## EFFECTIVENESS OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Several researchers have scrutinized the effectiveness of affirmative action programs, mostly focusing on its outcomes in terms of representation. Effective affirmative action means that affirmative action organizations should employ higher proportions of women and other traditionally underrepresented groups compared to other organizations in the same market sector.

By increasing gender equality in terms of representation, effective affirmative action programs should also facilitate the creation of gender inclusive work environments and workplaces where rewards such as promotions and pay are also more equitable (Crosby, 2004; Harris, 2009). Consequently, the potential positive outcomes of well-implemented affirmative action programs go beyond the sheer numbers to include increased job satisfaction and engagement among underrepresented groups and, by virtue of improving the work environment as a whole, higher organizational effectiveness.

On the other hand, should women who work for affirmative action employers report less job satisfaction and engagement than those working for organizations without affirmative action, regardless of representation, this might suggest that the policy has failed in achieving the larger goal of increased gender equity. The same applies to the functioning of the organizations as a whole. If affirmative action employers are less productive or less profitable than other similarly situated employers, then affirmative action could be considered an ineffective policy, even if it does increase the number of women in the organizations.

## *Sheer Numbers*

In terms of representation, the US Department of Labor has documented increases in the proportion of women and diverse employees in the United States as a direct result of affirmative action policies (Plous, 2003). Most reviews of social scientific studies, including research conducted by economists, have concluded that affirmative action has increased the representation of women and of ethnic minorities (Harper & Reskin, 2005; Schmukler et al., 2010).

Some have argued that white women as a group have thus far gained the most benefit compared to women of diverse background (Harris, 2009; Hartmann, 1996), perhaps due to increased access to other forms of opportunities and social capital. Giscombe (2011) notes that even within organizations that have progressive diversity and inclusion policies, employees who are more removed from those who typically have the most power – white men in the United States – are more likely to experience inequities; ‘hard work will get a diverse candidate in the door, but it will not necessarily assure her advancement’ (p. 3). Research also shows that within US firms and corporations white women report more positive experiences than women of color when it comes to finding mentors, building relationships at work, and navigating work environments (Bagati, 2008, 2009; Giscombe, 2008, 2011).

## *Beyond Numbers*

Given that most affirmative action programs focus on *access* to positions, it is difficult to assess their impact, beyond representation, in sustaining gender diversity and retaining women throughout their job and career paths. Do affirmative action policies help dismantle other subtle barriers to women’s achievements in the workplace, such as lack of access to mentors and social networks, lack of family-friendly policies, and gender stereotypes (Catalyst, 2004)? To the extent that these barriers are still present, affirmative



action programs might help increase the representation in the hiring of women but not women's advancement and retention within the organization (Crosby & VanDeVeer, 2000). Numerous studies have shown that affirmative action employers pay women better than other employers and also provide more advancement to women than other employers (Crosby, 2004). Recent research confirms the finding that women and ethnic minorities are most successful in organizations that provide formal support structures, including positive action policies (King, Hebl, George, & Matusik, 2010).

### *Undermining*

Organizational psychologist Madeleine Heilman suggested that women may feel undermined if they believe that they have been given rewards based on their gender. Over the years she has conducted a number of elegant experiments examining this proposition (Heilman & Alcott, 2001; Heilman, Battle, Keller, & Lee, 1998; Heilman, Block, & Stathatos, 1997; Heilman, Kaplow, Amato, & Stathatos, 1993; Heilman & Welle, 2006). Although the results of Heilman's experiments have often been mischaracterized, it is clear, as Crosby (2004) and also van Laar, Levin, and Sinclair (2008) point out, that Heilman's findings show that women feel undermined by affirmative action practices *when and only when* they are told that they have been advanced on the basis of gender and not on the basis of talent. As a study-by-study comprehensive review of Heilman's work shows, when women are led to believe that their gender played a part in their selection and that talent also played a part, they experience no assault to self-esteem (Crosby, 2004).

A recent set of studies by Unzueta and colleagues sheds light on the issue of self-esteem in the context of different hiring processes (Unzueta, Guterrez, & Ghavami, 2010; Unzueta, Lowery, & Knowles, 2008). Unzueta and colleagues (2008) found that white men's self-esteem is bolstered by the belief that affirmative action functions as a

quota system. Presumably white men who think of affirmative action as a quota system are able to justify why they did not achieve some goal. In both a correlational study with undergraduate students and an experimental study with a non-student population, Unzueta and colleagues (2010) looked to see if the observed relationship would hold among white women. They found that white women who did not (either spontaneously or through a manipulation) see themselves as the beneficiaries of affirmative action reported higher self-esteem than those who thought they had benefitted from the policy when the policy was framed in terms of quota.

Extrapolating from the laboratory studies, one might expect to see that women who work for affirmative action employers experience *less* satisfaction and company loyalty than those who work for other employers. Surveys do not show the expected patterns (Crosby, 2004; King et al., 2010). One might also expect to see that men who work for affirmative action employers are less satisfied than other men, in part because of potential threats to their self-esteem and in part because of more practical threats to their privilege. Yet, surveys do not show that men working for affirmative action employers are less satisfied or take less pride in their organizations than men working for other employers; indeed, at least one survey (Parker, Baltes, & Christiansen, 1997) has shown the opposite results (Crosby, 2004).

### ***Performance of the Organization***

The evidence on whether affirmative action facilitates individual and organizational performance is mixed, given the complexity of measures used to assess performance outcomes, and considering the variety of other factors that might affect efficiency and performance (e.g., self-efficacy, types of tasks, etc.) (Holzer & Neumark, 2000). Some critics have claimed that affirmative action forces organizations to hire people who are less qualified than they would otherwise employ with negative consequences for both

individuals and organizations (Steele, 1991). Others have hypothesized that White applicants might even avoid affirmative action companies for fear they will be less competitive; and indeed such an aversion has been found among subgroups in one laboratory study (Walker, Feild, Giles, Bernerth, & Jones-Famer, 2007). Still other scholars note that affirmative action might stir resentments among members of different groups and change perceptions of affirmative action candidates, making them appear less valued on the job. Echoing findings of Kravitz, Bludau, and Klineberg (2008), one intriguing laboratory study found that increasingly forceful affirmative action instructions led to the (simulated) hiring of more candidates from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds but also led those doing the hiring to decrease their evaluations of those diverse candidates (Colarelli, Poole, Unterburn, & D'Souza, 2010). Economists have speculated that poor opinions about affirmative action employees might lead to diminished organizational performance (Coate & Loury, 1993).

It is also highly plausible that affirmative action policies might increase organizational effectiveness (Mor Barak, 2011). Affirmative action and other programs that seek to increase gender equity put into place formalized structures that allow for greater transparency in decision-making and increased accountability in hiring and advancement decisions. Through increased transparency and accountability, affirmative action can help tackle other workplace barriers. For example, research shows that women and people of color report more difficulty than white men finding mentors and influential informal networks in companies (Catalyst, 2004), which can limit their access to important information and opportunities within their workplace (Sabattini, 2008; Sabattini & Dinolfo, 2010). Consistent with this possibility, Castilla and Bernard (2010) found increased transparency and accountability reduced the negative effects of individual bias and counteracted some of the 'paradoxical' dynamics of meritocracy – where

systems that emphasize meritocratic principles actually end up overlooking potential bias and favoring some groups over others.

Although not copious, some empirical non-laboratory evidence suggests a connection between affirmative action policies and organizational benefits. Studies conducted in the United States and Europe suggest that affirmative action leads to more efficient screening and recruitment processes for all candidates and broader access to labor markets (Holzer & Neumark, 2000, 2006; Stuber, 2002). Social scientists have documented the connection between affirmative action policies, on the one hand, and, on the other, positive organizational outcomes including improved efficiency, performance, and innovation (Harris, 2009; Holzer & Neumark, 2006). Decreasing potential discrimination makes it possible to recruit and manage employees more effectively, and encourages companies to utilize the full range of talent available (Alvesson & Due Billing, 2009). Studies have also shown that the increased diversity resulting from affirmative action and other formal diversity programs is related to improved team effectiveness, productivity, profitability, and more effective human resource procedures such as recruiting (Crosby, 2004; Stuber, 2002).

Thus, both individuals and organizations can benefit from increased transparency around unwritten rules and other implicit norms that inadvertently privilege some on the basis of characteristics that may or may not be related to competence or merit (Sabattini & Crosby, 2008; Sabattini & Dinolfo, 2010).

## **ATTITUDES TOWARD AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

In the United States, attitudes towards affirmative action remain complicated, despite decades of successful affirmative action practices (Aberson & Haag, 2003; Crosby, 2004; Crosby et al., 2006; Vasquez & Jones, 2006). In general, public opinion polls find

that a majority of people within the United States support equal opportunity and some form of affirmative action (Plous, 2003). Yet, support is not nearly as strong or as consistent as one would expect given the devotion to the ideals of justice and equality (Crosby, 2004), and many still perceive conflict between proactive diversity strategies and meritocratic processes (Walton, Spencer, & Erman, 2013).

Researchers have looked at variations in support for affirmative action as a function of characteristics about the rater and also as a function of characteristics of the programs (Crosby et al., 2006; Haley & Sidanius, 2006; Kravitz et al., 2008). Some studies have investigated people's understandings of what affirmative action entails (Golden, Hinkle, & Crosby, 2000), while others have manipulated participants' understandings by providing different framings for the policy (e.g., Kravitz & Klineberg, 2002; Richardson, 2005).

Four consistent effects have emerged and have been noted in reviews (Crosby et al., 2006). First, the target of an affirmative action plan influences Americans' reactions to the policy. Consistent with research on racial prejudice and discrimination, respondents endorse affirmative action plans for women (Sniderman & Piazza, 1993), disabled people (Kravitz & Platania, 1993), and elders (Clayton, 2006) more than for racial/ethnic minorities. Second, those who stand to benefit directly from affirmative action endorse the policy more strongly than those whose narrow interests might be threatened (Golden et al., 2000). Third, opposition to affirmative action decreases as prejudice decreases (Crosby & Dovidio, 2008). Finally, the majority of citizens in the United States seem to prefer 'soft' affirmative action plans to 'hard' affirmative action plans, with quotas being almost universally disliked (Kravitz et al., 2008). Researchers have also found that some factors interact, so that, for example, divisions of opinion among people of different race and ethnic backgrounds are greatest when the plan described is a hard rather than a soft policy (Kravitz et al., 2008).

## ***Continuing Patterns***

The social, economic, and political landscapes of the United States are constantly changing. Someone with the skin tone of Barack Obama could not have been elected President at the time that Executive Order 11246 was put into place. Nor could we have had a female Secretary of State in 1965. Sometimes the changes are continuous and gradual, and sometimes they are sharp and sudden. The question therefore arises: Do the studies published since the last review about people's attitudes toward any form of affirmative action (including gender-based affirmative action) in employment or education cause us to re-think any of the four effects previously found?

In the last five years very few studies have been conducted that document how the target of affirmative action affects people's reactions to the policy. One study has shown that Spanish-speaking Latino students are thought to be more worthy of race-based help than other Latino students (Sanchez & Chavez, 2010). Flores and Rodriquez (2006) conducted a survey of faculty members at a large university in the Rocky Mountains and found that White men were much more in favor of affirmative action practices that target women than practices that target people of color. This finding shows continuity from earlier studies.

Current research is also corroborating the earlier finding that people's self-interest influences how they view affirmative action. Men continue to express less endorsement of gender-based affirmative action practices (Flores & Rodriquez, 2006; Prokos, Baird, & Reid Keene, 2010) and related policies (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2010) than do women. Whites continue to endorse race-based affirmative action practices less than people of color (Aberson, 2007; Boekmann & Feather, 2007; Oh, Choi, Neville, Anderson, & Landrum-Brown, 2010). Support for affirmative action among mixed-race individuals increases as a function of identification with people of color (Good, Chavez, & Sanchez, 2010).

The analysis reported by Prokos and colleagues (2010) shows that self-interest can extend beyond individuals to include family members. In a secondary analysis of the General Social Surveys (GSS) conducted in 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006, with representative cross-sections of the nation's adults, the researchers found an interesting interaction. Among employed adults, mothers who had daughters but no sons favored gender-based affirmative action significantly more than other mothers and fathers. Oddly, fathers who had daughters but no sons favored gender-based affirmative action significantly less than other fathers and mothers. Prokos and colleagues explain the pattern of results for the mothers in terms of extended self-interest. The explanation for the surprising paternal pattern may lie in the way that the GSS measure of support was phrased – characterizing affirmative action as a measure that makes up for past discrimination. As other research has shown, for privileged groups to endorse measures that acknowledge unequal benefits would be tantamount to acknowledging that he had been receiving unmerited advantages (see also Branscombe, 1998; Garcia, Desmarais, Branscombe, & Gee, 2005). The reasons as to why fathers of daughters might need to protect their self-esteem more than other fathers remain an empirical question.

Given the documented role of self-interest in reactions to affirmative action, it can feel like a Herculean task to overcome resistance to the policy among those who are not directly benefited. Hideg, Michela, and Ferris (2011) have demonstrated in the laboratory that one way to increase support for affirmative action is to involve the non-beneficiaries in the creation of programs, providing an added sense of 'voice' and ownership of the process. Hideg and colleagues obtained similar results in terms of gender (Study 1) and race (Study 2).

Another similar method for increasing support is to remind men of their own value systems. One survey study of almost 300 men who were senior leaders in large organizations

(Prime, Moss-Racusin, & Foust-Cummings, 2009) found that appeal to higher ideals (i.e., whether the program would help improve the business and communities where they operated) and self-relevance (i.e., relevance to their current job) were important predictors of men's willingness to participate in a gender-focused diversity training. In a related interview study of male champions for gender diversity in the workplace (i.e., men already engaged in gender-related initiatives or identified by women colleagues as a supporter of gender equality), Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) found that one important premise of supporting gender equality was the recognition that inequality still exists. Awareness of gender bias coupled with a strong sense of fair play – defined as a strong commitment to the ideals of fairness – were what best differentiated men who actively championed gender equality from other men.

These studies contain an important lesson: if we want affirmative action and other gender diversity programs to succeed, it is vital to have men feel that they are part of the group setting the policies. People take an interest in seeing success for the programs they have created. Interestingly, Hideg and colleagues (2011) found that psychological involvement changed attitudes toward affirmative action as a policy without changing attitudes toward the direct beneficiaries. This pattern of results was unexpected. Yet research has consistently found a strong connection between the level of prejudice, on the one hand and, on the other, the level of support for, or opposition to, affirmative action both in survey studies (Matseuda & Drakulich, 2009) and in the laboratory (Shteynberg, Leslie, Knight, & Mayer, 2011). Oh and colleagues (2010) discovered that level of racial prejudice is an even stronger predictor of attitudes toward race-based affirmative action than is self-interest. In a longitudinal study of students at the University of Michigan, Aberson (2007) found that involvement in a diversity program produced both decreases in racial prejudice and increases in support for affirmative

action. Finally, in a clever experiment, Ramasubramanian (2010) demonstrated that support for race-based affirmative action programs diminished when participants were primed to think of African Americans and Latino Americans as criminal or lazy, with the inference being that such implicit associations may exist among opponents of affirmative action outside the laboratory.

What about gender prejudice, which is our current focus? In an analysis of GSS data from 1996 to 2006, Kane and Whipkey (2009) conclude that racial prejudice plays a much stronger role in predicting attitudes toward race-based programs than gender prejudice plays in predicting attitudes toward gender-based programs. Gender prejudice is, nonetheless, still an influence on opposition to affirmative action. Interestingly, in a survey of whites' opinions about different forms of hiring and educational policies, the researchers found that prejudice toward black women had the largest effect on whites' attitudes; specifically, white attitudes toward black women were more strongly related to negative opinions about affirmative action than whites' attitudes toward black men (Steinbugler, Press, & Johnson Dias, 2006).

Concerning the last finding of prior reviews – that some forms of affirmative action garner much more support than others – the current evidence seems to confirm previous conclusions. How one frames a policy matters (Gamliel, 2007; van Londen, Coenders, & Scheepers, 2010). DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post's (2011) qualitative analysis of over 200 interviews, found that white participants often separate the notions of 'equal opportunity' and 'affirmative action'; they would thus express support for equal opportunity, which most saw as a desirable goal, and still oppose programs such as affirmative action.

### ***Explanations for the Lukewarm Endorsement***

Over the years, Crosby and colleagues have attempted to explain the relatively weak support that Americans feel for affirmative

action (Crosby, 2004; Crosby, Iyer, Clayton, & Downing, 2003; Crosby et al., 2006; Crosby & Dovidio, 2008). Current studies, like the earlier ones, suggest that many factors contribute to the lack of enthusiasm for affirmative action in the United States, which Crosby and colleagues found surprising given the US 'devotion' to justice and given the clear efficacy of affirmative action in advancing justice (Crosby & Bearman, 2007).

One factor is the general ignorance or confusion about what affirmative action entails (Aberson & Haag, 2003; Boeckmann & Feather, 2007). In general, providing an explanation or justification for the policy leads to increased approval (Aberson & Haag, 2003; Knight & Hebl, 2005; White, Charles, & Nelson, 2008). Those who know what affirmative action entails support the policy more than those who do not.

Another factor is the conviction that affirmative action is not needed. When it comes to gender equality, many believe that enough advances have been made and that the status quo is no longer in need of further revisions (Brodish et al., 2008). Even some of those who are not privileged by the system may justify it when inequality and discrimination are not apparent (Kay et al., 2009). For example, Son Hing, Bobocel, and Zanna (2002) found that people are more likely to increase their support of affirmative action when discrimination is made salient in an experimental situation, and Case (2007) found the same to be true for students enrolled in a seminar-long course. Prime and Moss-Racusin (2009) also found that men who were more aware of gender bias were also more likely to support gender equality.

If one imagines that the world functions as it should, then it would seem logical to infer that a policy that seeks to 'improve' the world may come at some cost to oneself and to others who are currently reaping well-deserved benefits. Thus, if one does not know much about how the policy really operates, there might be no challenge to that inference. O'Brien, Garcia, Crandall, and



Kordys (2010) have shown that it is possible to manipulate the degree to which people feel that affirmative action policies threaten or bolster their material self-interests. In the absence of an experimental manipulation, the default option for those with some privilege might be to assume that affirmative action will prove costly to the self, and thus to feel threatened by the policy. Even those who are knowledgeable about how affirmative action works might find in the policy a reminder of how little they have done personally to deserve their privileges and so might feel somewhat unsettled by the policy. As evidenced by the findings on competitive victimhood (Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012) people are highly motivated to maintain an image of themselves and of their own in-groups as ethical beings who reap only those rewards that they deserve (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007). Only if they have a way to deal effectively with the feelings of guilt or over-privilege that threaten their equanimity might people endorse affirmative action policies (Does, Derks, & Ellemers, 2011).

A fourth factor that helps explain the tepid support for affirmative action is the Western adherence to individualism with its overvaluation of individual measures of merit and a discomfort with group-based identity markers. A number of years ago Ozawa, Crosby, and Crosby (1996) conducted a study in the United States and Japan in which they told students about a case of sex discrimination and asked which remedial measures would be appropriate. Japanese students were much less distressed than American students about the discrimination scenario, but American participants were also much more reluctant than Japanese participants to undertake remedial affirmative action measures. More recent studies have shown a continuation in differences between individualistic cultures and collectivistic ones (Savani, Stephens, & Markus, 2011). Focus groups in Australia showed an emphasis on the individual and subsequent discomfort with group-based equalizing policies (Augoustinos, Tuffin, &

Every, 2005). Meanwhile, studies in collectivist cultures, such as India and China, report more favorable attitudes toward positive action policies (Combs & Nadkarni, 2005; Combs et al., 2005) and so do those in cultures accustomed to high levels of government support, such as Norway and Sweden (Jakobsson & Kotsadam, 2010).

Related to the fourth factor, Crosby (2004) argued that one reason many in the United States resist the policy of affirmative action is that US culture has a taste for simple justice and distrusts complexities. Yet to see why affirmative action is fair requires one to make some complicated conceptual distinctions. A simple dictum, for example, says: treat everyone the same. But complexities arise when one asks what exactly it means to treat everyone the same. Does treating everyone the same mean, for instance, giving everyone a uniform of one size or does it mean giving everyone a uniform that fits (and thus is of different measure)? Recent studies have indicated that people are ill at ease with such complexities and prefer, instead, simplistic applications of meritocratic principles (Castilla & Benard, 2010; Plous, 2003; Son Hing et al., 2011).

The fact that even non-prejudiced people may dislike affirmative action because of the policy's affront to individualism or because of their attachment to simplistic notions of justice should not blind us to the part played by the final factor: prejudice. Individuals who hold sexist beliefs – which are often linked to denial that gender discrimination still exists – dislike affirmative action, and those who are neutral about affirmative action are likely to harbor more sexist beliefs than those who are firmly pro-affirmative action. Clearly, one explanation for the weakness of US support for affirmative action entails culturally based undervaluation of women and of people of color. Within the workplace, women are still seen as less competent than men and thus unworthy of proactive measures to improve their situations (Jackson & Garcia, 2010). Men tend to gain more respect than women with equal

qualifications (Jackson, Esses, & Burris, 2001) and evaluation criteria shift when evaluating women's and men's competence (Fuegen & Biernat, Chapter 9 this volume; Phelan, Moss-Racusin, & Rudman, 2008), thus it is hard to recognize when men are receiving more favorable treatment relative to women.

## CONCLUSION

The research outlined here presents some important insights for organizations and policy-makers seeking to execute programs that support gender equality, even beyond affirmative action policies. Clear communication, transparency, and education about a policy's processes and goals can help increase buy-in and positively affect the policy's effectiveness. It is also important to highlight how any program might benefit individuals and organizations beyond the direct beneficiaries. Finally, to address behaviors and attitudes at the root of bias and discrimination it is necessary to consider the overall culture of the organization and institution where the policy is being implemented. Of course, research is needed to see which of the strategies we outline proves most effective in various cultural contexts.

Affirmative action has played a large role in the advancement of employed women over the last decades. Yet the policy has received puzzlingly tepid public endorsement. We have explored several factors that may explain the puzzle. But, popular or not, affirmative action needs to continue. Without constant self-reflection and motivated self-monitoring, organizations can too easily slip into the bad old habits that prevent true gender equality.

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